A Choral Dream

A "TOME OF STARS" COMPANION

SHEET MUSIC/SCORES

STARGAZER ELENTIRMO

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Foreword

Tome of Stars is art, therapy journal, and (failed) exorcism, a celebration and an elegy. It follows a narrative arc through a relationship's birth and death, passing through passion, longing, and life-long grief.

Tome of Stars consists of 100+ poems and associated music. Cosmic imagery saturates the collection, reflecting the beloved's ties to the heavens in the author's thoughts. The work is a flawed attempt to chart a universe of feeling and experience through emotional and psychological labyrinths that have for decades left the poet lost and bewildered.

The work is an effort assembled from diverse elements over many years by Stargazer. It combines personal, therapeutic, and artistic impulses with the power of modern generative technologies to realize the poet's vision. The author is a writer of published fiction with more than ten novels released over several decades. He is acting anonymously here to protect the privacy of others involved.

This book is a distilled and curated collection of poems incarnate as choral music in sundry styles. The poet is a middling musician at best. Yet the music moves him and he would love it to be sung, as his heart's blood is in every line. But he apologizes in advance for any and all insults to music, musicians, singers, composers, and musical sensibility in his efforts. As with the entire *Tome of Stars* project, it is public domain, and you can do with it as you will. He would love, however, someday to hear a choir in all heartfelt earnestness, sing these songs to the stars.

Stargazer

tomeofstars.net

Analyzing Analysis

Go not to the Elves for counsel,
for they will answer both no and yes.
—Frodo Baggins, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Before we begin, *a warning*: poets prove poor pedagogues. Mystery is our muse and ambiguity our opioid. Many of us suffer from severe allergies to certainty and dogma, lust for alliteration and assonance, and seek the drug-like high of metaphor to the detriment of both our verse and daily lives. I won't even start with all that rhyming nonsense some of us meter out.

Before the score for each song in this choral collection, you will find an analysis of the poem, but if you are hoping for a definitive dissection of the verse, these breakdowns may become a source of disappointment.

"What the author meant" is often nothing more than a cheap and lazy form of reader heart-and-mind control. To be painfully frank, even I don't know exactly what I mean at times. Rereading my own poems, it can feel like I am entering a familiar dream that I repeatedly misremember and whose disintegrating echo I passionately massacre in crude translation to language. I often ask myself: what in the world was I trying to say here? Why, this isn't how I feel or what I think at all! And, a recurring favorite, why do I cry when I read these lines?

As a sibling non-volunteer member of this species, doomed to inherit an amalgamation of flaws, dreams, confusions, prejudices, yearnings, and lunacy, you should not find this in the least surprising. Poetry is condensed, metaphorical, and written in the language of symbolism from the faded shroom-like visions of baffled sentimentalists. It impartially births both monsters and masterpieces. Some poems are both.

Many of the poems in *Tome of Stars* were distilled from long, meandering letters or years of emotional experience, pages upon pages of prose, conversations, unsent messages, or silent reckonings of the soul. *How can one distill that into 14 lines of rhyming iambic pentameter?*

It's impossible. Beware then the mysterious alchemy that is employed. Poets seize an ocean of obvious events, simple words, and meanings the size of mountains and then dare to transmo-

grify them into the mental space of a thimble. Much (most?) is lost and yet much is gained in this mad transmutation. And, on rare occasions, what survives in that thimble can be more potent than anything one could have written in a thousand pages.

That's why everyone should believe in miracles. But the literary analyst should be wary lest they very much lose their way in a labyrinth of assumptions, pride, and low imagination (the poet's or their own).

Art has meaning for people quite outside the artist's intent - often contrary to their intent. Given the diverse experiences and personalities across humanity, the irrational and unknowable machinations of our minds (even, or especially, to ourselves), as well as the shudderingly clumsy and imperfect media available to convey those imaginings to another awareness, I do not believe it should be any other way.

Nonetheless, many often find it valuable (or at least entertaining) to know more about what the artist might imagine their intent to be, the meaning of the language used, the symbolisms baked into their psyche, the allusions and delusions incorporated into the text. In this companion section, I hope to walk through the poems in *Tome of Stars* and provide such a perspective.

However, in offering analysis here, I don't claim authority, even as the author. Perhaps most especially *not* as the author. I certainly don't want to wield "what the author meant" like a cudgel to control your reading. That phrase, in the wrong hands, becomes a weapon that shuts down a reader's wonder and imagination, their critical integration and application of the art to help fashion meaning in this crazed universe. Art and life are far too important to give that much of a damn about the author.

Take these analyses instead as a meandering tour of "might-have-beens," a friendly companion to your own interpretations, not a replacement. If a poem strikes you differently than the analysis herein, I hope you'll trust your own resonance. Sing from *your* heart!

One poem in the collection was initially titled "Ciggendra Gehwelc Wile Pœt Hine Man Gehere", which is Old English for "He who cries out wants to be heard." I chose this not out of a love for (or even knowledge of) Old English itself, but because important elements of symbolism in *Tome of Stars* have ties to a significant figure from my youth: J.R.R. Tolkien. One of Tolkien's main biographers and defenders, philologist Tom Shippey, writes in his book *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*:

> *"Some have felt (and said) that he should have written his results up in academic treatises instead of fantasy fiction. He might then have been taken more seriously by a limited academic audience. On the other hand, all through his lifetime that academic audience was shrinking, and has now all but vanished. There is an Old English proverb that says (in Old English, and with the usual provocative Old English obscurity), Ciggendra gehwelc wile pœt hine man gehere, 'Everyone who cries out wants to be heard!' Tolkien wanted to be heard, and he was. But what was it that he had to say?"*

Similarly, some deep part of me clearly wants to be heard as well. Generally, and, despite her devastating antipathy toward me, by the Stargirl herself.

And I must also acknowledge that this journey is not without its burdens. I do not simply mean the investment of time, energy, and resources in an endeavor like this, nor the efforts to

maintain secrecy and anonymity (the latter perhaps doomed, for which I apologize in advance to those involved in taking this risk).

More pressing is the emotional and spiritual weight of constantly keeping this heartbreak before my awareness. When thinking or writing about this collection, it was not uncommon for my mind to slip to *Tomb of Stars*, a perspective on the existential anguish within it, seen not diffracted through the prism of a star-crossed romance, but through a glass, darkly (and yet with truth).

It would seem far simpler to let it go entirely, to dismiss my beloved, our shared creation, our history, a near endless sea of suffering, and my own heart. Hurl this Ring of Power into the fires Orodruin. Yet, despite my many attempts to do so over the years, the failure in such efforts has been nothing short of spectacular (perhaps I simply have lacked for my own Gollum). As the poem *Apologia* argues:

"Move on," they grunt, as shedding some worn cloak.
Are hearts thus merely dressed and simply shorn?
"Let go," the mantra modern masses croak.
My hands are empty; chains my soul adorn.
True adore's steel, it pierces blood and bone,
Forever shackling in shrines of stone.

Still, I am neither obligated to remain emotionally and intellectually engaged, nor to pour my energy into producing and maintaining *Tome of Stars* and its sundry elements (like this book). Unlike her place within my soul, such efforts remain a choice. And though I strive now to make that choice, it will be an arduous quest, one that I cannot predict, and one in which I may certainly fail, either in this life, or due to my life's ending (I am no longer remotely a young man and have already struggled with serious disease). As with all things, time will tell.

So, on those notes of cheer and good will, let us gently begin. Take the analytic contents book as you would a conversation over wine or weed with a slightly deranged friend: prone to digressions, often incorrect, occasionally profound, and, above all, heartbreakingly, embarrassingly earnest (and as the years stagger by, increasingly tired).

Advice is a dangerous gift,
even from the wise to the wise,
and all courses may run ill.
—Gildor Inglorion, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Bharatanatyam and Tolkien

Such an array of influences that I feel like it is best approached with an annotated guide.
—JTC, aka "Chemical Waste," Signal chat, March 28, 2025

Be careful what you wish for, my old friend.

But indeed, this poet's awareness is overburdened, and many oddities creep into the work without introduction or explanation. Most can be ignored. Two require, I believe, some introduction: these are (1) the formative influence of J.R.R. Tolkien's legendarium and the rampant symbolism from it imbuing the author's writings, and (2) the impact of classical Indian dance (Bharatanatyam) on the collection from structure to metaphor (and real life elements in some verse).

VARDA ELENTÁRI

Perhaps the most central element of backstory involves Tolkien's character of Varda. So I'll indulge a little bit here and talk about her.

Tolkien's cosmogony centers on a monotheistic deity called Ilúvatar (the "All-Father"). While part of the created cosmos, Ilúvatar transcends it, and all that exists has root cause in him. This is a theological framework consistent with Tolkien's strong Catholicism, and his faith informed the stories and myths he developed. Ilúvatar births other spiritual beings, the *Ainur*, angelic intelligences, through his thought alone:

> *There was Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Ilúvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made.*
> —J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*

Among the Ainur, Varda is counted as one of the greatest. She participated in the *Ainulindalë*, or the *Music of the Ainur*, a cosmopoietic collaboration of angelic beings metaphorically

described as a great symphony. Ilúvatar gifts them a great theme that they take up and add to from their own creative energies. This collaborative composition forms the foundation of the universe's structure and destiny:

> *With Manwë dwells Varda, Lady of the Stars, who knows all the regions of Eä. Too great is her beauty to be declared in the words of Men or of Elves; for the light of Ilúvatar lives still in her face. In light is her power and her joy. Out of the deeps of Eä she came to the aid of Manwë; for Melkor she knew from before the making of the Music and rejected him, and he hated her, and feared her more than all others whom Eru made.*
>
> —J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*

In this passage is mentioned Melkor, the Satanic fallen-angel of the mythology, the greatest in power and knowledge of the Ainur who fell from grace before the making of the world and sought to control and pervert the Music. He is later called by the Elves *"Morgoth"*, the *Dark Enemy*. In contrast to the darkness of Morgoth is the light of Varda, the angelic spirit he feared the most, for light was her essence and power, and she fashioned the stars to gift illumination to the Children of Ilúvatar:

> *Then Varda went forth from the council, and she looked out from the height of Taniquetil, and beheld the darkness of Middle-earth beneath the innumerable stars, faint and far. Then she began a great labour, greatest of all the works of the Valar since their coming into Arda. She took the silver dews from the vats of Telperion, and therewith she made new stars and brighter against the coming of the Firstborn; wherefore she whose name out of the deeps of time and the labours of Eä was Tintallë, the Kindler, was called after by the Elves Elentári, Queen of the Stars. It is told that even as Varda ended her labours, and they were long, when first Menelmacar strode up the sky and the blue fire of Helluin flickered in the mists above the borders of the world, in that hour the Children of the Earth awoke, the Firstborn of Ilúvatar. By the starlit mere of Cuiviénen, Water of Awakening, they rose from the sleep of Ilúvatar; and while they dwelt yet silent by Cuiviénen their eyes beheld first of all things the stars of heaven. Therefore they have ever loved the starlight, and have revered Varda Elentári above all the Valar.*
>
> —J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*

Thus, more than almost any other figure in Tolkien's legendarium, Varda Elentári is the uncorrupted light that opposes darkness.

In my own life, Varda went far beyond a simple fictional character in the eccentric mythology of an English linguist. She entered early, when I was still a teen in a house where no god was ever named, except in anger (my parents had both suffered under abusive figures in organized religion). There was no religion in my upbringing, only the erratic, often cataclysmic rhythms of a deeply dysfunctional home, marked by abuse, silence, and the strange hyper-vigilance that children develop when chaos becomes their air. I came to Tolkien young, too young to fully understand the world he built, but not too young to recognize that something in it shimmered with a beautiful transcendence that I needed, desperately. And in those pages, amid

the grandeur of Valinor and the sorrow of exiled Elves, I found Varda Elentári, Star-Queen, the Lady of Light that stood undimmed before the darkness.

At the same time I was also falling in love with the stars themselves. Not mythology, not metaphor, but the physical sky of our observable universe. Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* awakened my mind and my sense of wonder, and provided a path to stoke that fire through knowledge and scientific inquiry. His reverence for the vastness of space, for the immensity of time, for the fragile miracle of consciousness in the void, resonated with something deep within me. In that terribly vast beauty, human brokenness lost potency. I could transcend through awe and thought the ugliness around me (and within). Whereas others are unnerved to feel the grandeur of the universe that erases their significance, for me, it was liberating. Salvific.

In the Varda of Tolkien's legendarium, creator of the stars, the one whom Melkor feared and whom the Elves venerated, I found a mythic embodiment of that cosmic awe. Not as a deity to believe in, but as an imaginative symbol that became psychically incarnate: the one who placed light in the darkness to guide God's Children. Her presence lingered in me like starlight, unseen, but felt. There is a kind of inner mythology that develops in children who are left too long alone with pain and wonder. Varda became a personal divine abstraction, the goddess of everything that remained pure, even when I'd never myself had the experience of the sacred (except in my own head through imagination). She married my love of Tolkien's myths with my love of the greater creation beyond Earth.

Years later, long after life had buried my youthful dreams in layers of toil, responsibility, and depression, a woman flashed into my life like a star being born and I fell in love with mythic force. *Tome of Stars* was born from my failure to love her as she should have been loved.

Her name was fatefully that of a constellation. That fact might seem charming and trivial, a poetic coincidence. Not for me. Names matter to the creatures on Earth that *name things*, and stories wrap themselves around names, and my need and imagination were too pathological. In ways neither she nor I fully understood, she entered my private cosmology. She became my Varda. She was my Stargirl, the secret archetype long gestating in a boy who stared too hard at the stars for personal deliverance.

And so, when I say that Varda is more than a literary figure, I mean that in the strange interior map of my psyche, she became a fixed point, one whose light refracted through a trinity of science, fantasy, and love.

Understanding this contextualizes many symbols and references in *Tome of Stars*, even if it might not present a coherent construct of a poet's ravaged psyche.

BHARATANATYAM

The Stargirl danced through all aspects of life, but she found great meaning and joy in Bharatanatyam. When I met her, she had stopped dancing due to career focus, and I quickly realized it was a great loss for her, diminishing her light and joy. After some time of my encouraging her to dance, she took it up again, and dances still. And while I cannot see her perform (being banned from her domain), classical Indian dance will always occupy a special place in my heart.

When assembling this collection, I decided to structure it in a symbolic manner following a

margam, the structured program for performances of this dance form ("margam" translated as "path" or "journey"). This was done in two ways. First, *Tome of Stars* was divided in six *Items* (how the different dances in the recital are typically called in English). These six sections are both thematic and chronological, spanning the beginning of the relationship (*Item 1:Anthesis*, the flowering) through its dissolution to a final unending, prolonged grief and emotional devotion (*Item 6: Scripture*).

Within each item, the actual elements of a margam show up as individual poems titled by the item name (in this choral collection, two such poems appear: *Shlokam* and *Mangalam*). In these sonnets, I tried to meld traditional interpretations of the dance item with elements of our narrative and personalities.

I apologize in advance for where artistic, personal, and cultural limitations reflect poorly on this ancient and elevated art form in the eyes of practitioners and lovers of Bharatanatyam.

Anthesis

The opening Item of *Tome of Stars*, titled "Item 1: Anthesis", comprises nineteen poems that chronicle the flowering of a romance. It is named from the botanical term for the period during which a flower blooms. As with most of the poems in the collection, the language oscillates between intimate and mythic. Cosmic and classical imagery embeds a personal romance inside more metaphysical concerns.

The poems in *Anthesis* haphazardly chronicle a narrative from discovery and vulnerability to embraced adoration. Foundational motifs in the poet's mind are introduced and nurtured here, and will arise repeatedly in different contexts as the collection progresses and the relationship evolves.

Overall, this section introduces the Stargirl as both a woman of the poet's fancy and as a mythical figure to the poet's awareness, overwhelming in her effect on him, the material reality of human interactions crossing over to the transcendent and spiritual in his conceptualizations. They set the emotional and symbolic architecture of the stage on which tragedy and transformation will unfold.

Note: *Shlokam* and *It's Light Wherein I Dwell* are from *Item 5: Quixotosis* and a companion collection, *In Darkness and in Light*, not from *Anthesis*, the first Item of the poetry book. However, their essence fits well in this section, and to order the choral pieces in related sections for mood and coherency in performance, they were put here.

I. Dance, Stars!

Dance, Stars! was not written so much as it was assembled as poetically as possible from a word frequency breakdown of the remainder of the collection. (Seriously)

After finishing the first drafts of *Tome of Stars*, the poet undertook various breakdowns of the text searching for literary "tics", both known and unrecognized. Many automated tools exist to perform such work (which he has used for his novels in the past), and indeed he found that he had even in this (relatively smaller as compared to his novels) collection a set of repeated phrases and words that could not be justified in their repetition solely by the needs of the poem, but which likely find their deep roots in his subconscious. It is impossible to root out all such verbal traps, but one can seek to reduce their occurrence.

As part of this, he had one such tool generate a word and phrase frequency list. As he was looking at the list, his mind started stringing the most frequent words together into phrases. Before he realized it, he was composing a poem with the absurd constraints of (1) keeping the frequency order as much as possible and (2) not introducing any other nouns or verbs, but allowing himself to introduce articles, prepositions, and other elements (and at times modifying the words—changing singular to plural, verbing nouns, etc.). He mostly kept to the rules.

The end product shocked him in being not only a poem he enjoyed reading, but also one that felt like an eccentric but not inaccurate encapsulation of the collection. He then decided to include it as an Epigraph and Foreword, inaugurating the poetry collection.

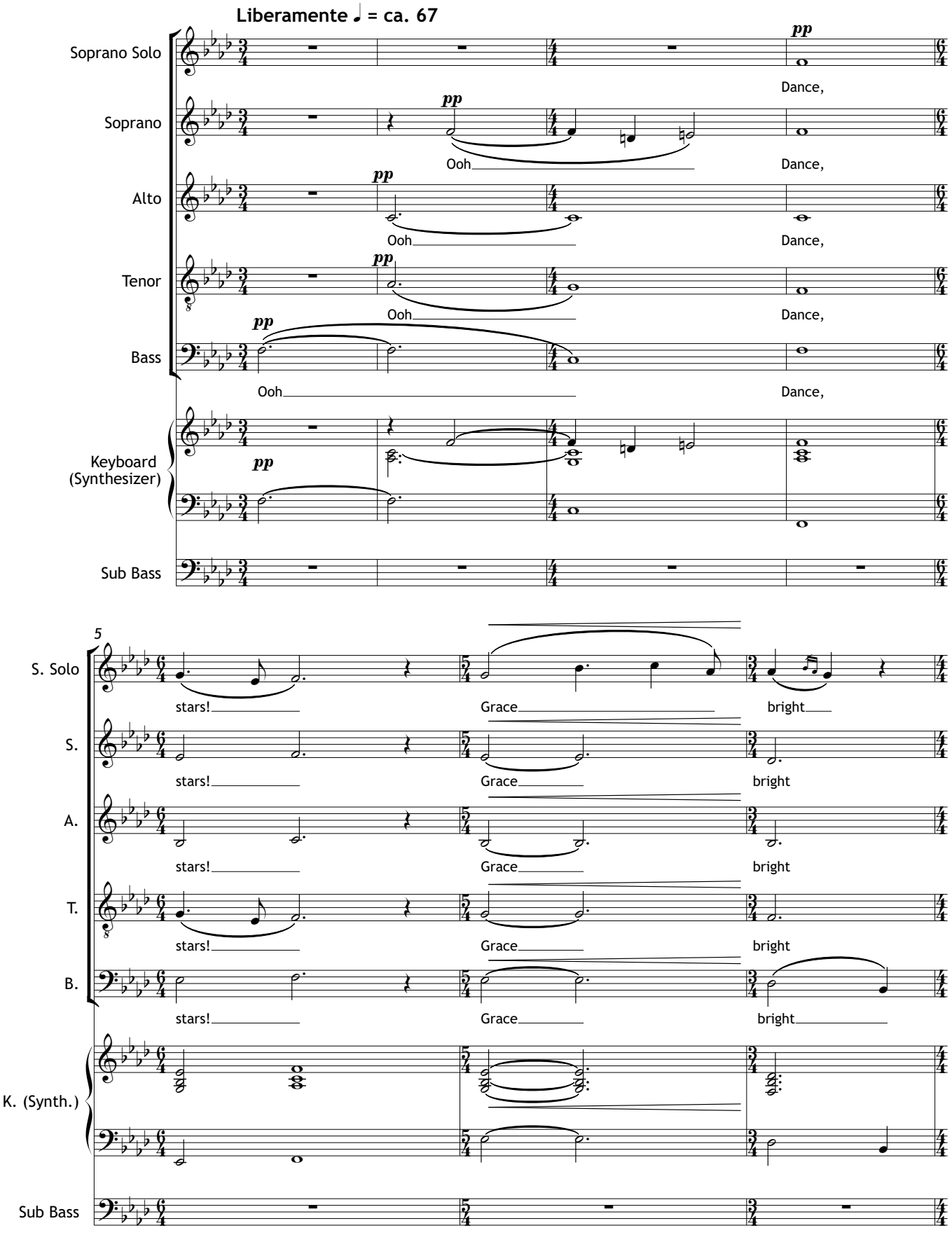
Studying this poem itself is an analysis of a distilled version of *Tome of Stars*. The word choice is built into the manner in which the poem was created and reflects, in a direct but distorted manner, all the verse that is to come. It was used as a preview — a “teaser trailer” for what comes — as it both summarizes and also resamples to near meaninglessness what comes after, whatever the poet’s efforts to imbue a loaded word list with its own life. An interesting artistic experiment.

Dance, Stars!

Anthesis: Item 1 of "Tome of Stars"

Stargazer

Choir SATB and Keyboard (Synth)



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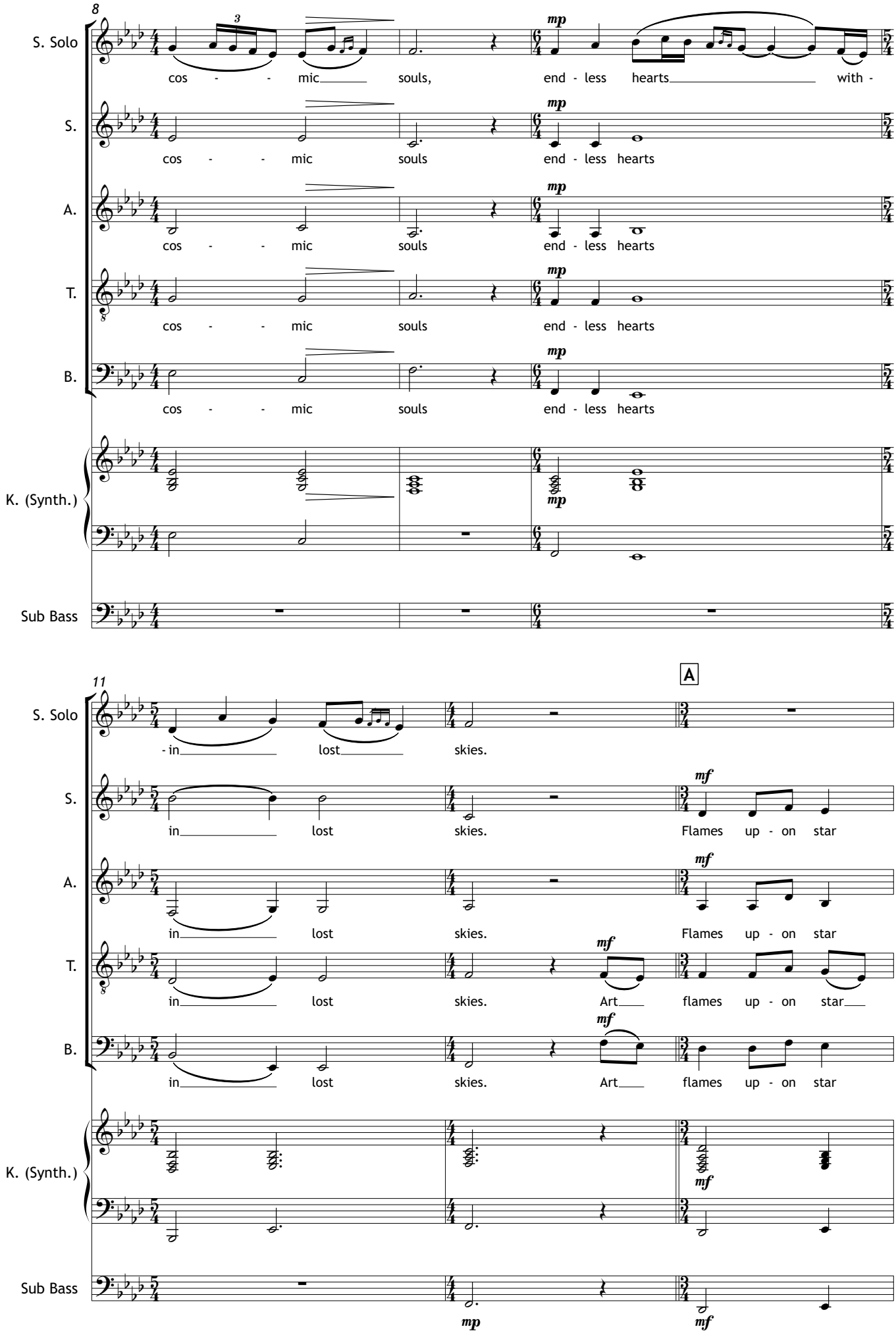

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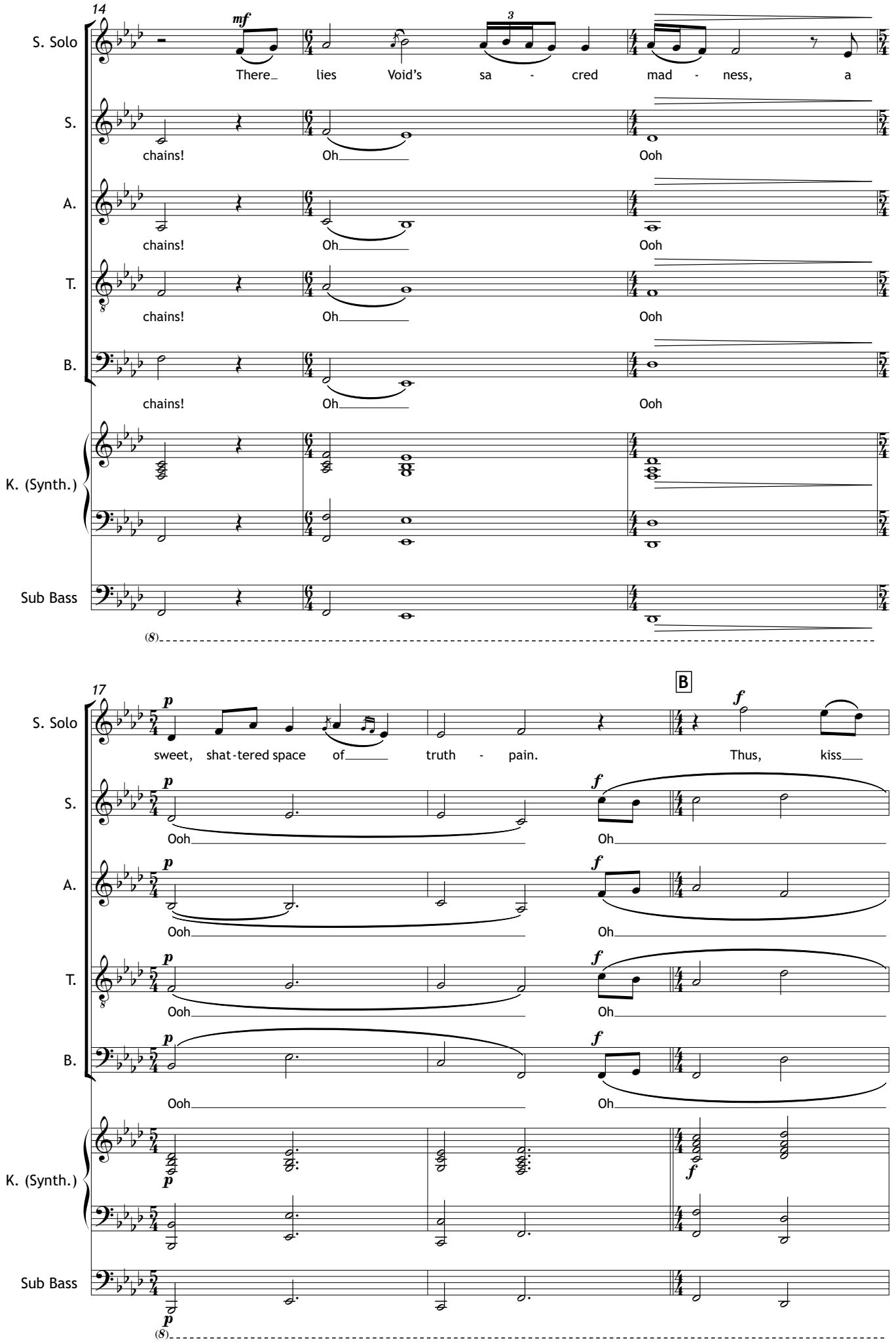
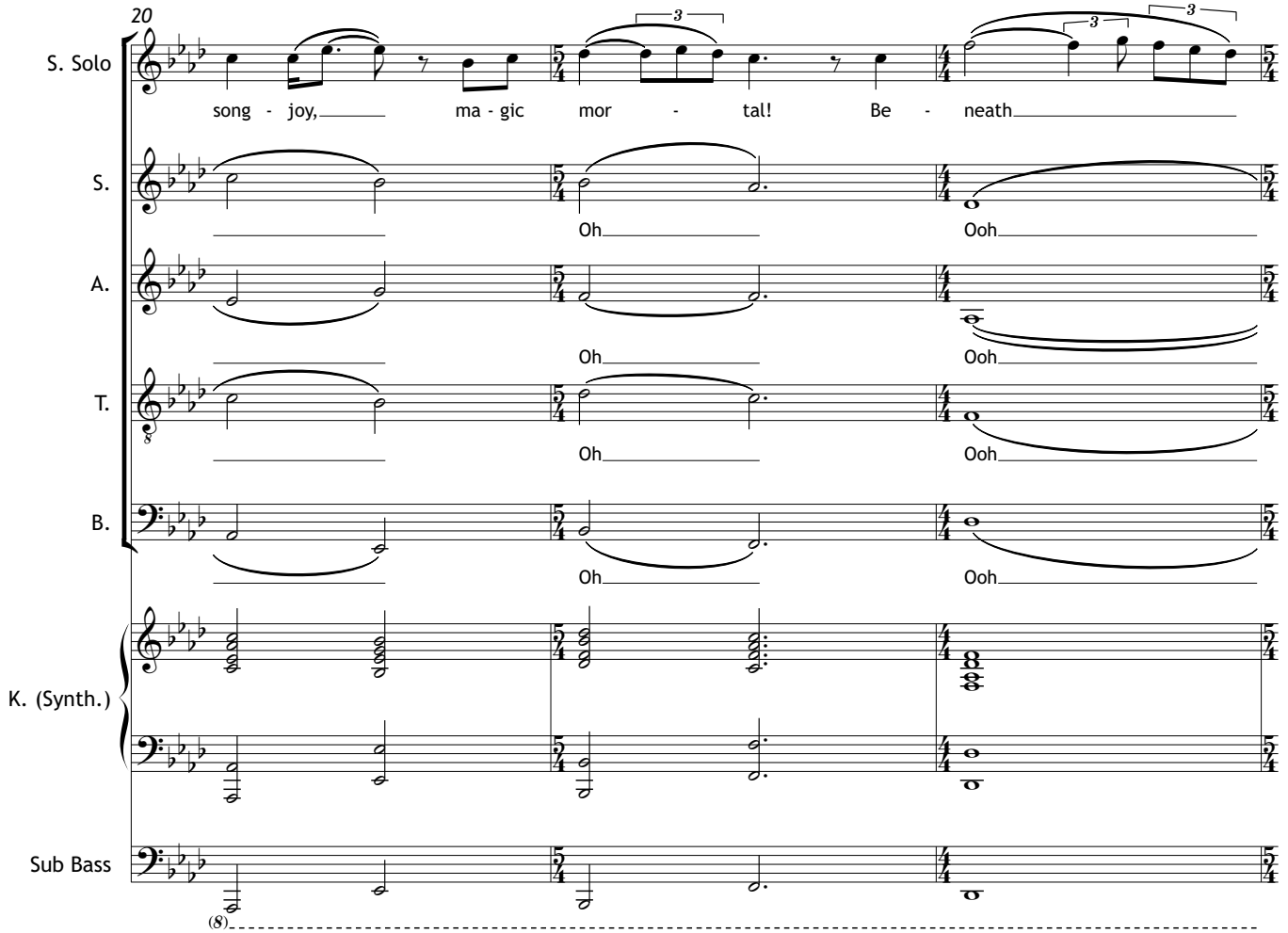
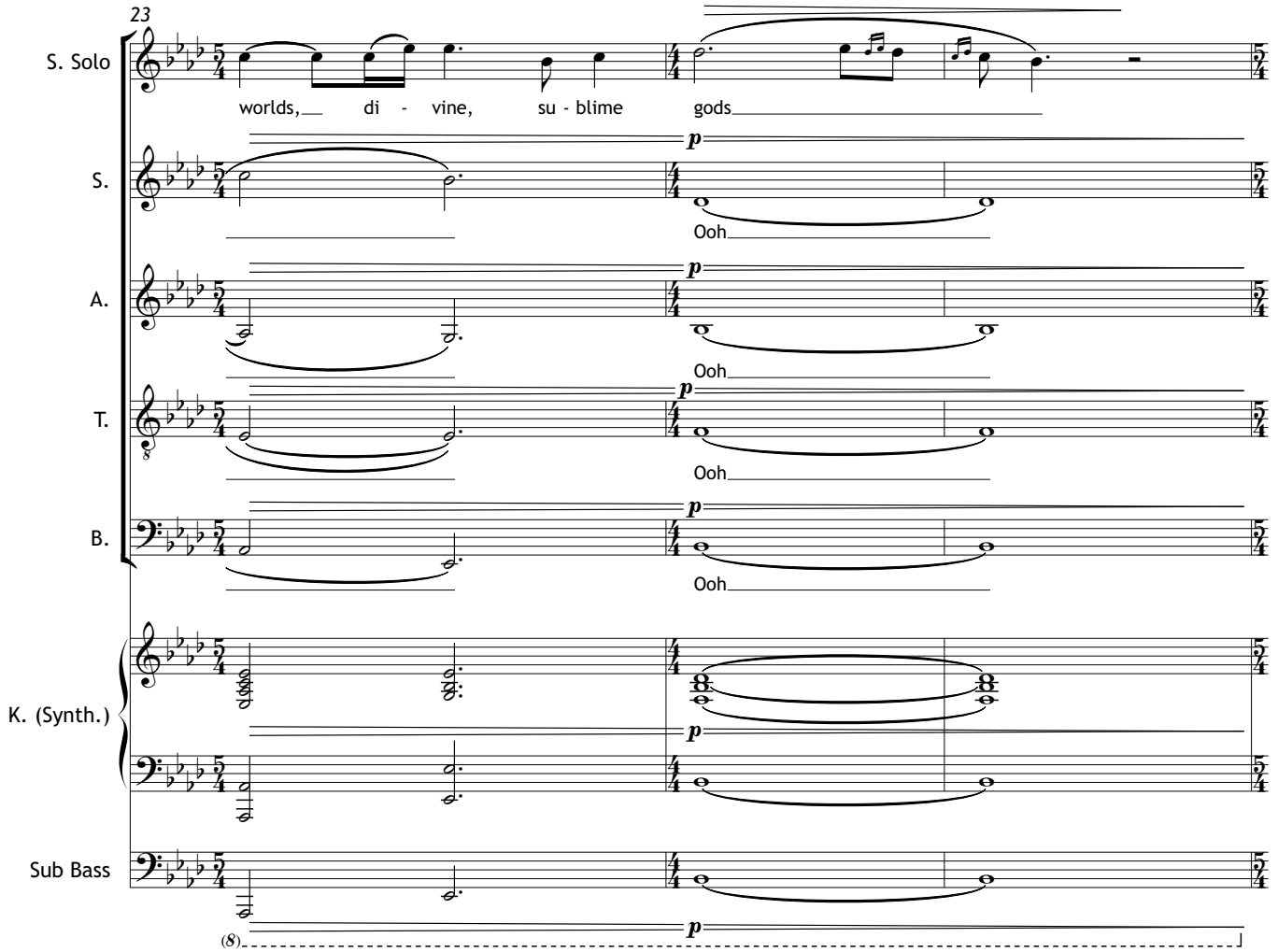

14
S. Solo
S.
A.
T.
B.
K. (Synth.)
Sub Bass
mf
There lies Void's sa - cred mad - ness, a
chains!
Oh
Ooh
17
B
p
f
sweet, shat-tered space of truth - pain.
Thus, kiss
Ooh
Oh
(8)





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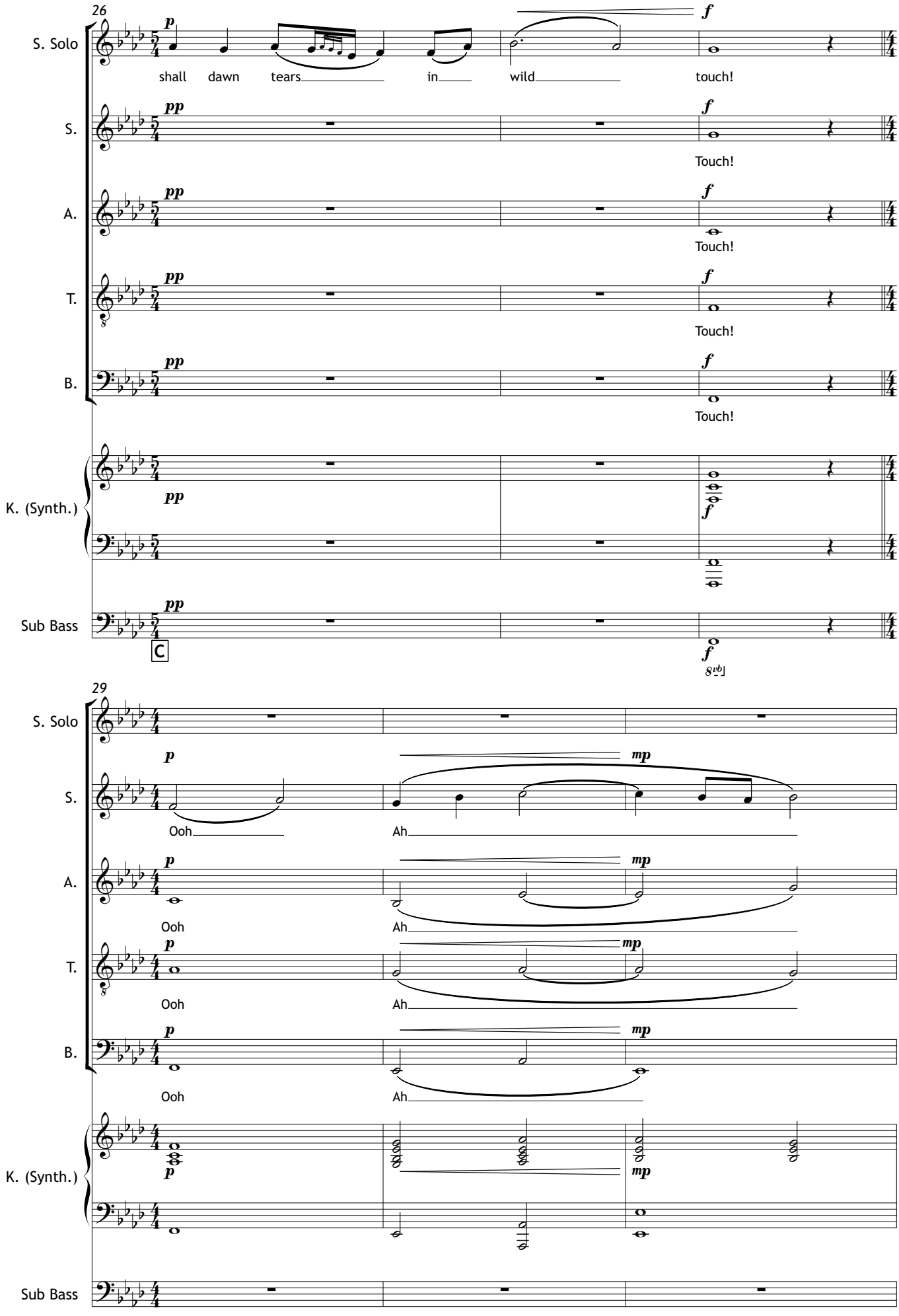
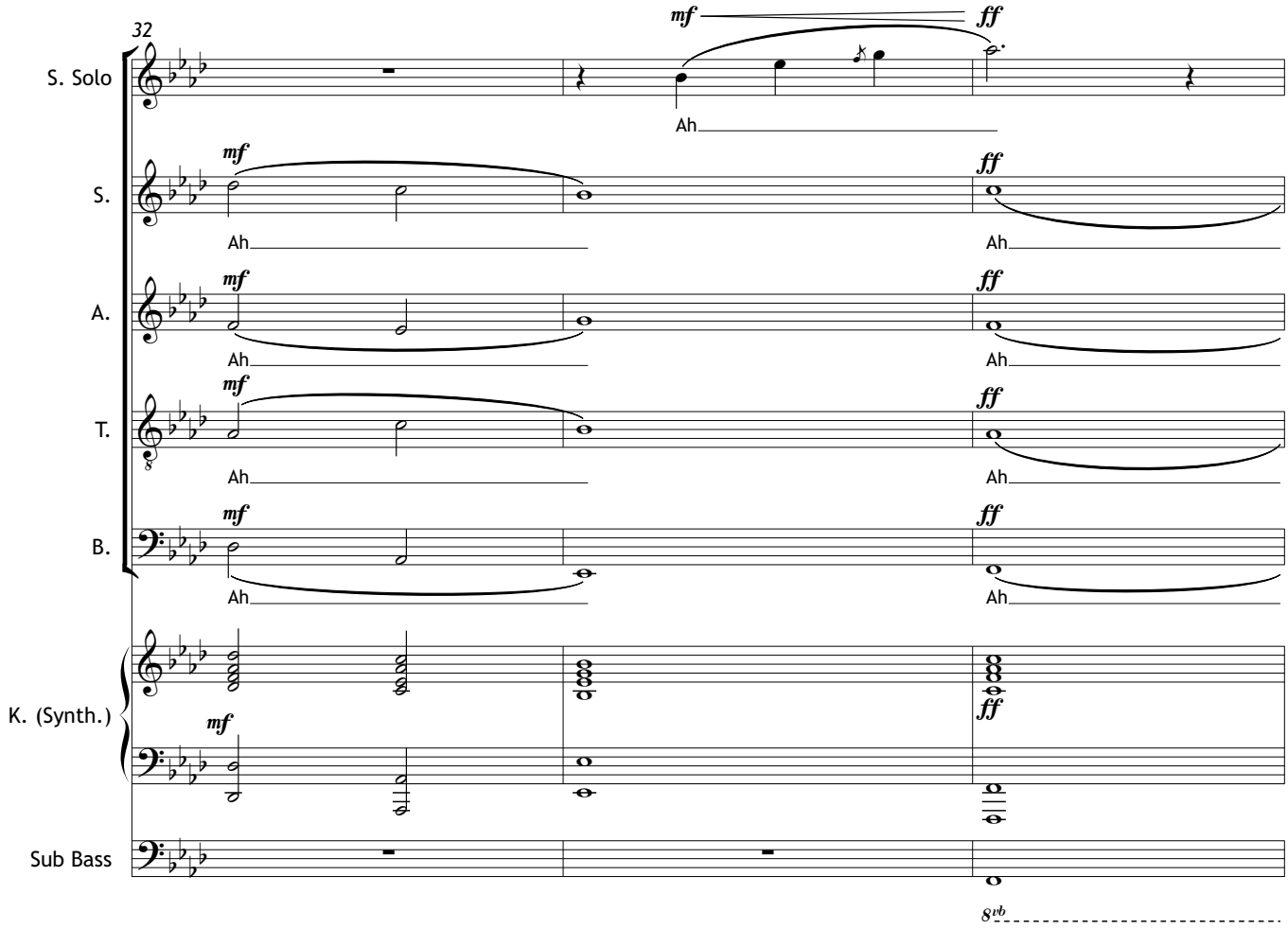
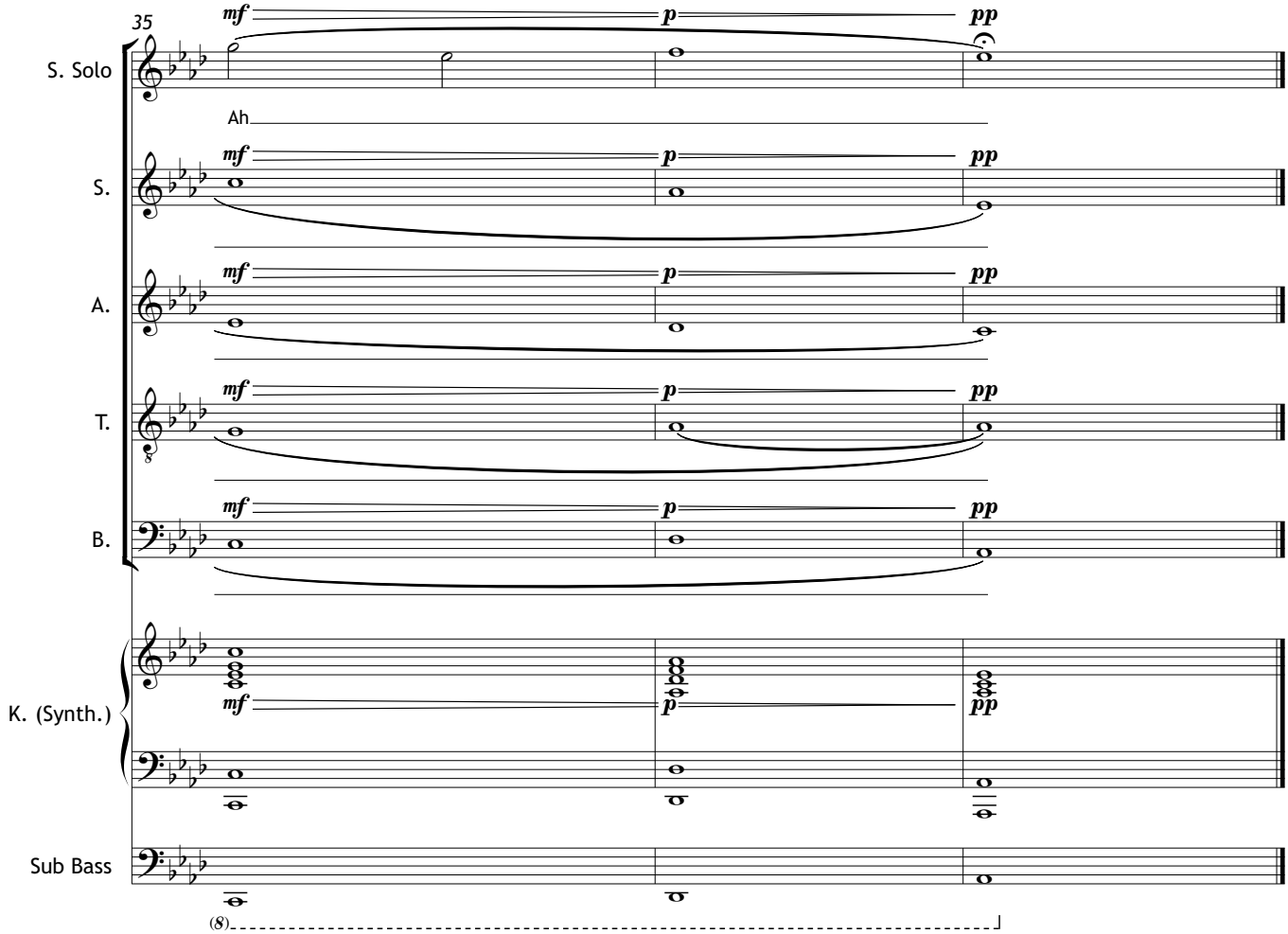

26
S. Solo
S.
A.
T.
B.
K. (Synth.)
Sub Bass
p
pp
f
shall dawn tears in wild touch!
Touch!
C
8vb
29
mp
Ooh
Ah





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2. Pro Logos Asteron

Pro Logos Asteron is a Greek-inspired neologism that is meant to mean something like "Prologue of the Stars." It's a meditation on the idea of the celestial realm as a metaphor for artistic exploration (of relationships, emotion, and meaning in this context). In this way, it functions as a poetic prelude that is a meta-commentary on the entire collection in *Tome of Stars*.

In this prologue, *the stars are stories*, each with its own nature and tale to tell. The poem considers the gamut of possible stories from triumph to tragedy, star birth to black holes, social groups to isolation. It gives the reader the “lay of the universe” in the poems to come where cosmology, myth, and emotion interweave in complex ways in the personal mental space of the writer.

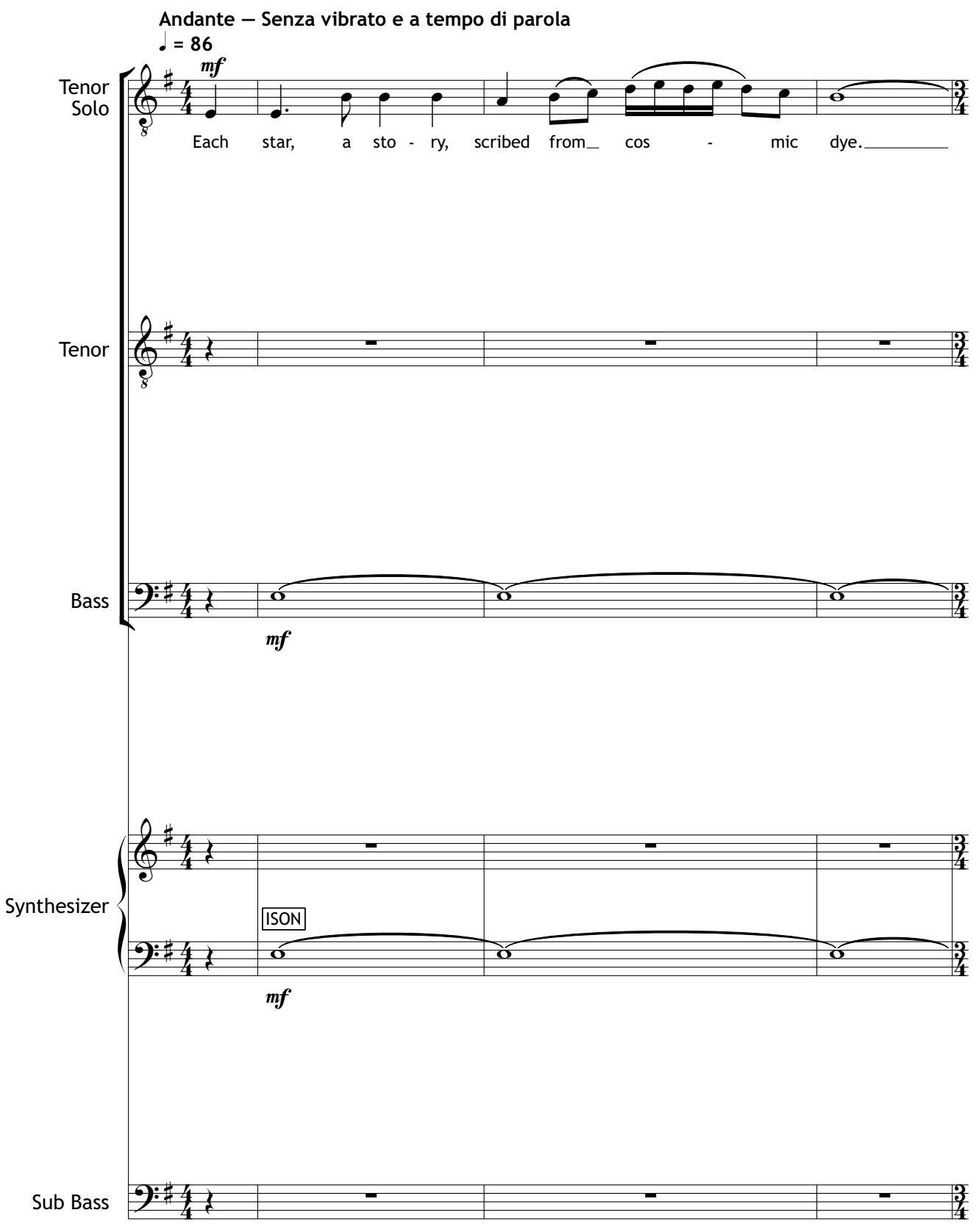
Most critically, it is centered on the lifelong inspiration the heavens provided to the writer and the life-altering encounter with the “heavenly body” of the Stargirl. She is the ancient force of astrometaphysics through which all is now measured and perceived by the poet. While she is not named here, *Pro Logos Asteron* would not exist without the Stargirl, and its full meaning is found within the rest of the collection that meditates on the metaphorical cosmic centrality of her being.

Pro Logos Asteron

Anthesis: Item 1 of "Tome of Stars"

Stargazer

Vocal Ensemble



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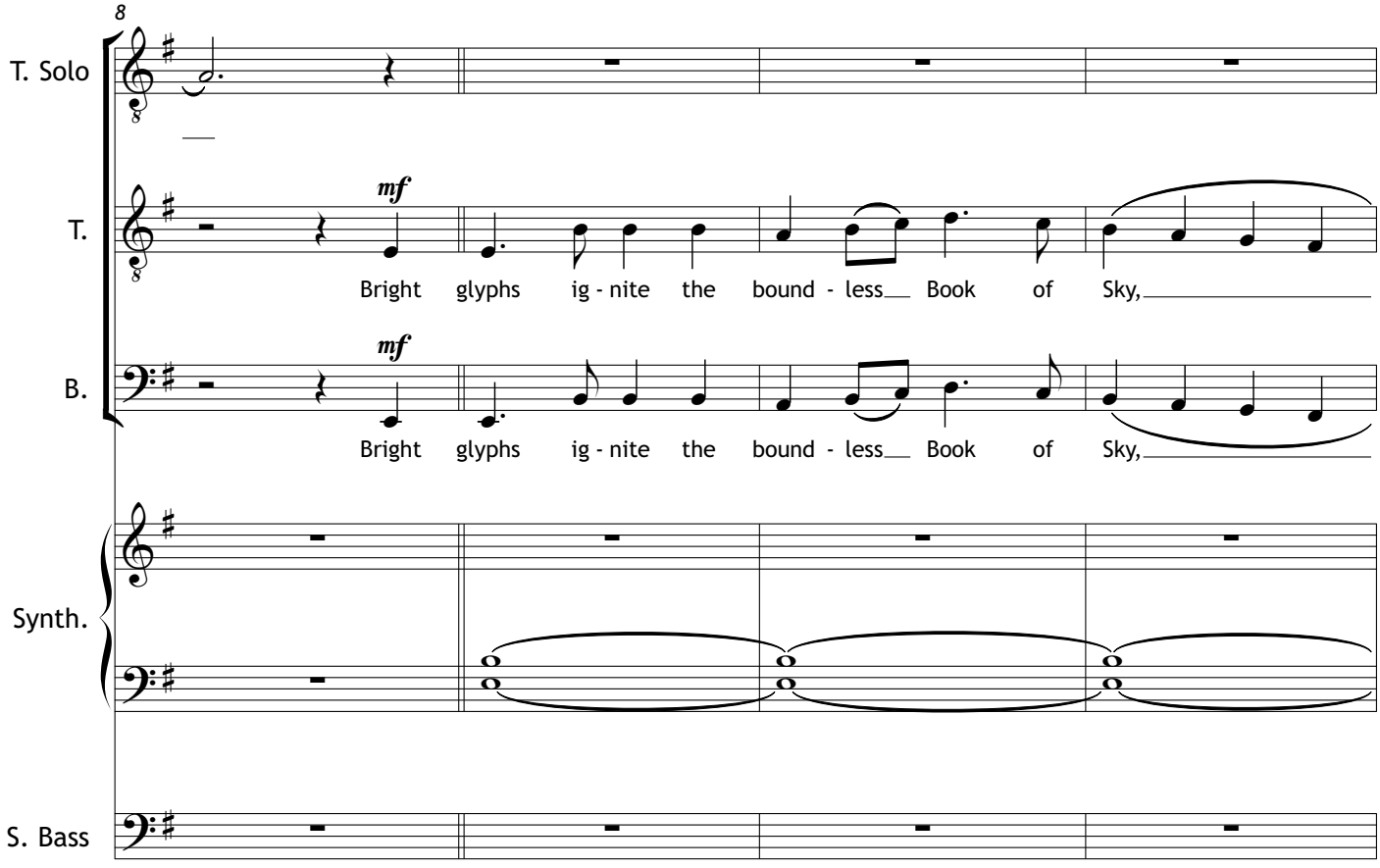

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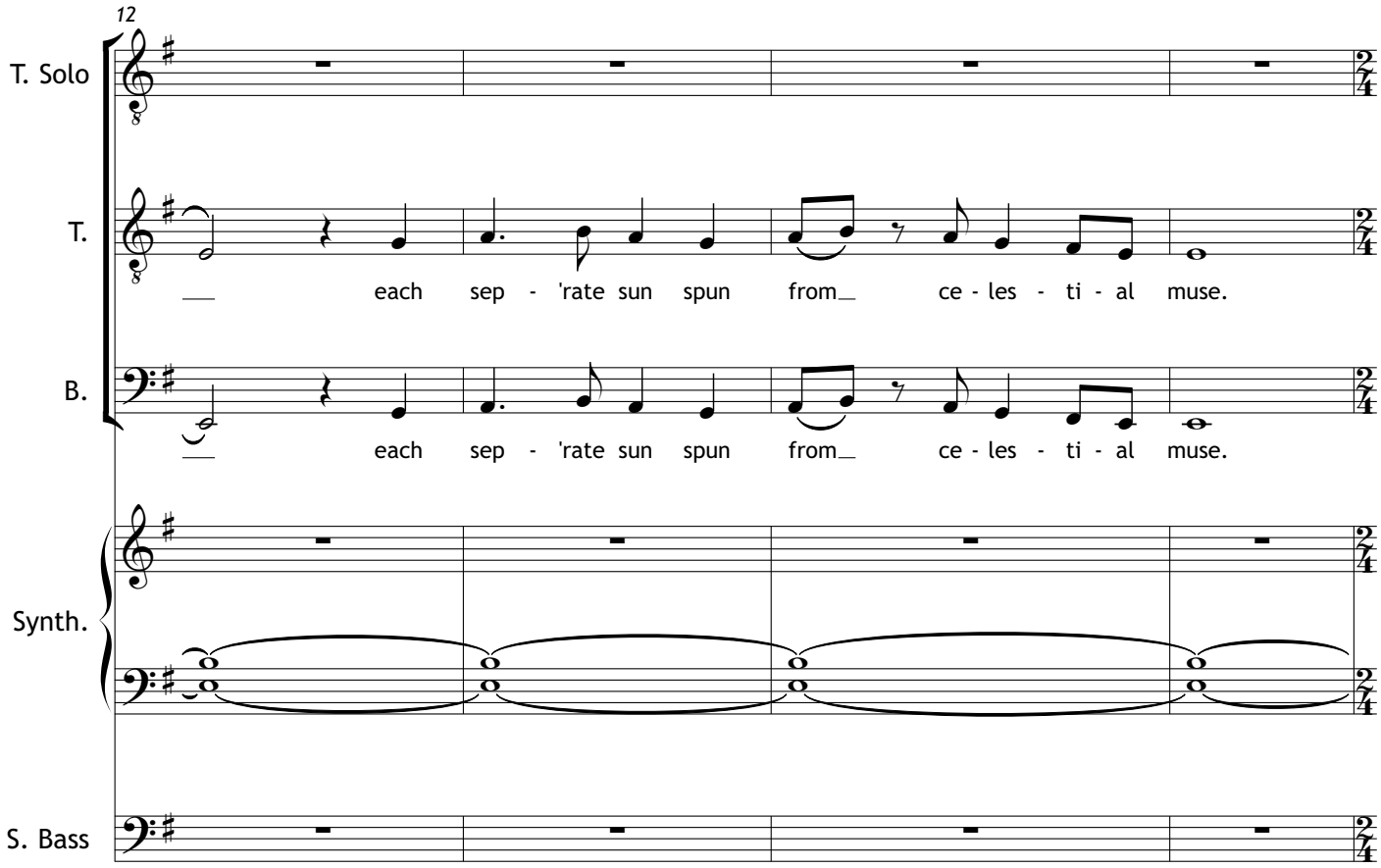

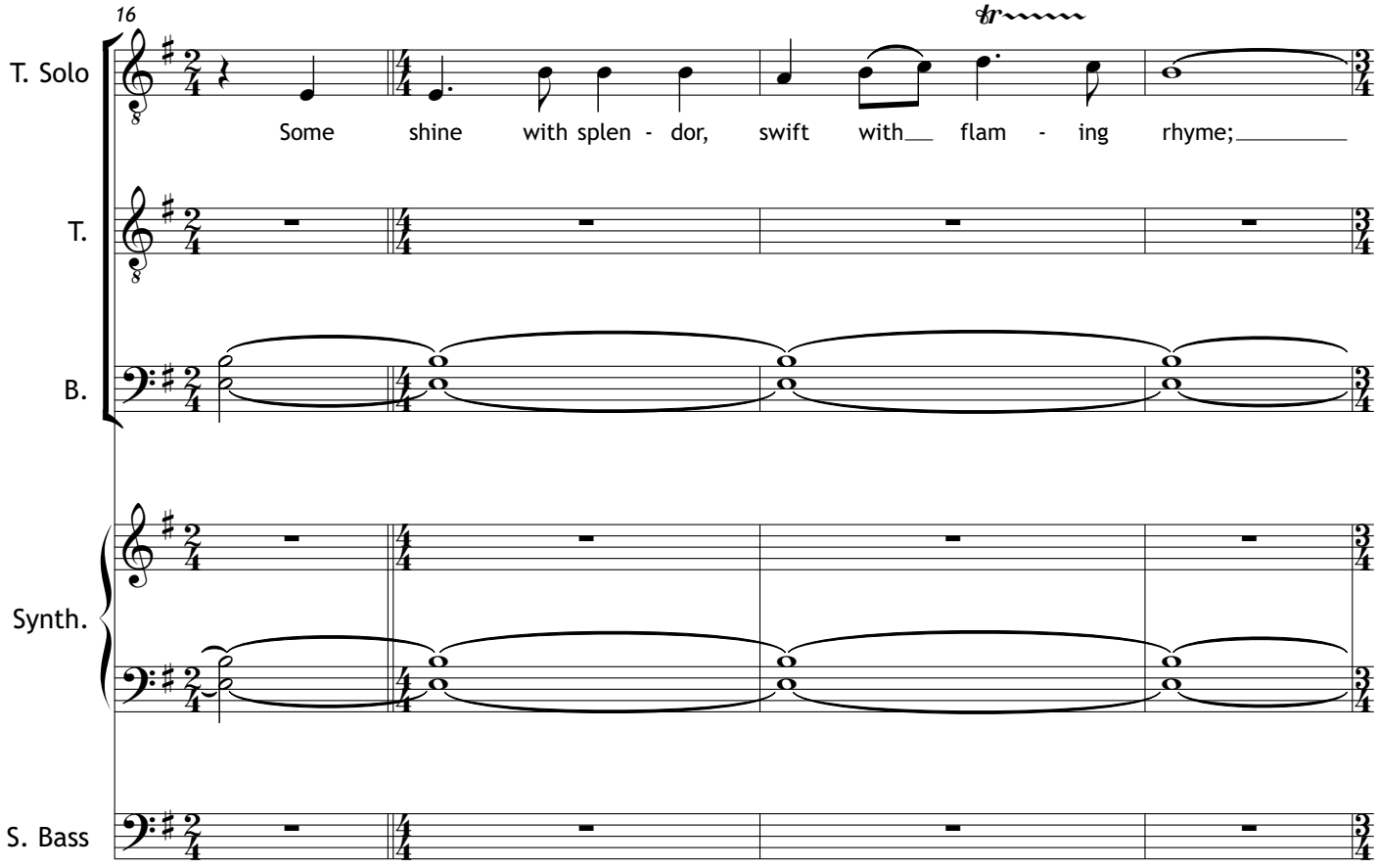

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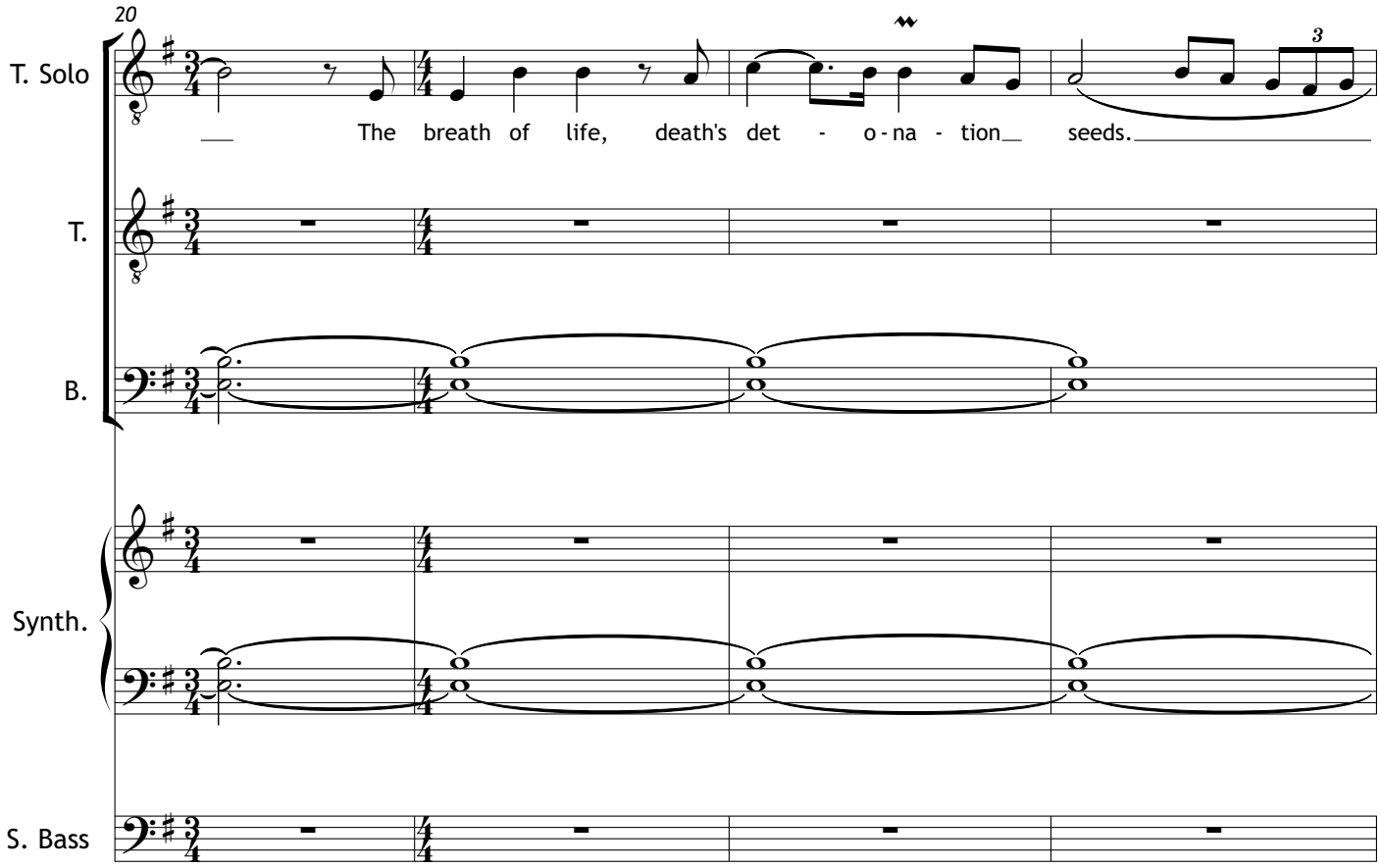

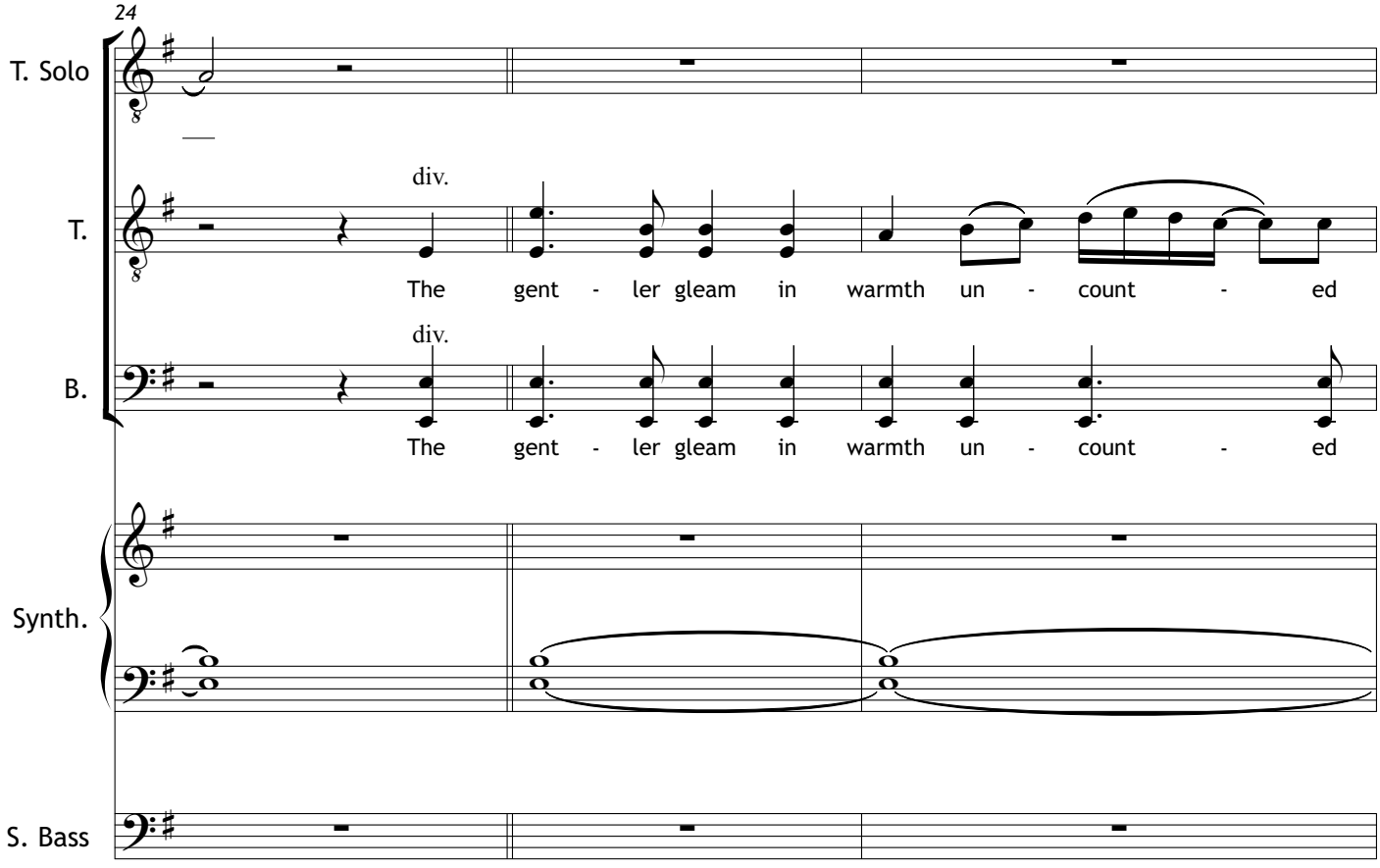

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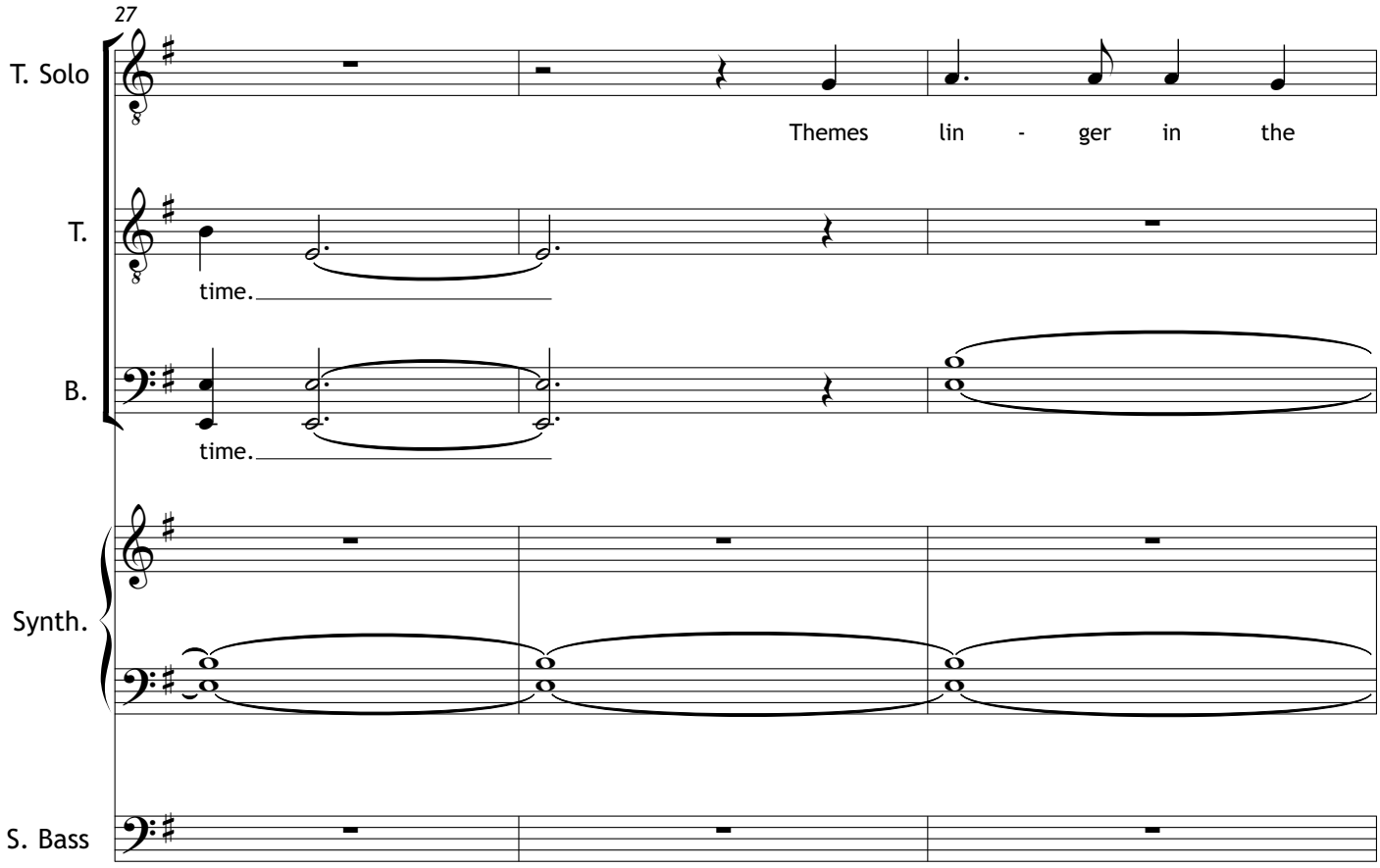

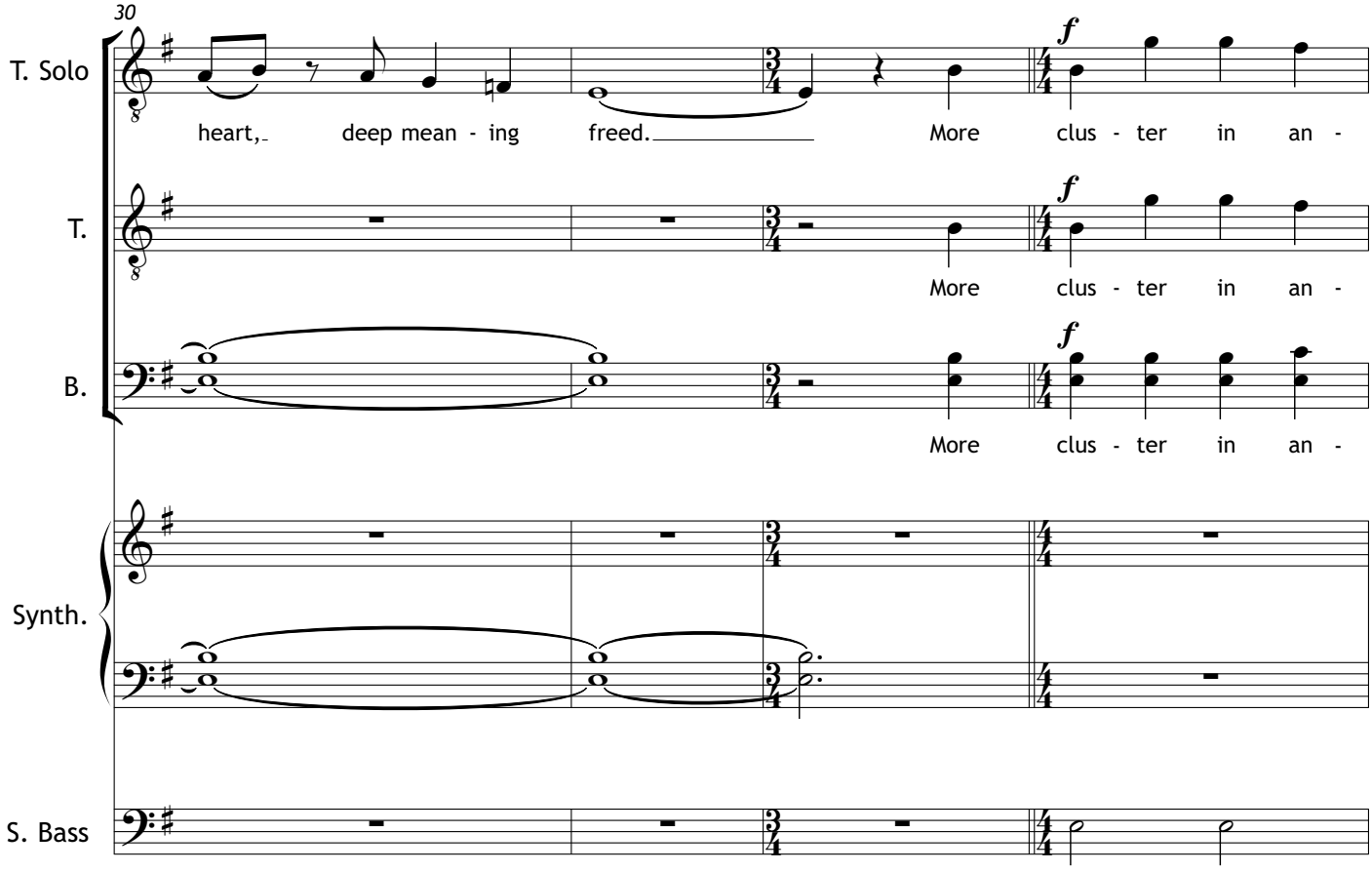

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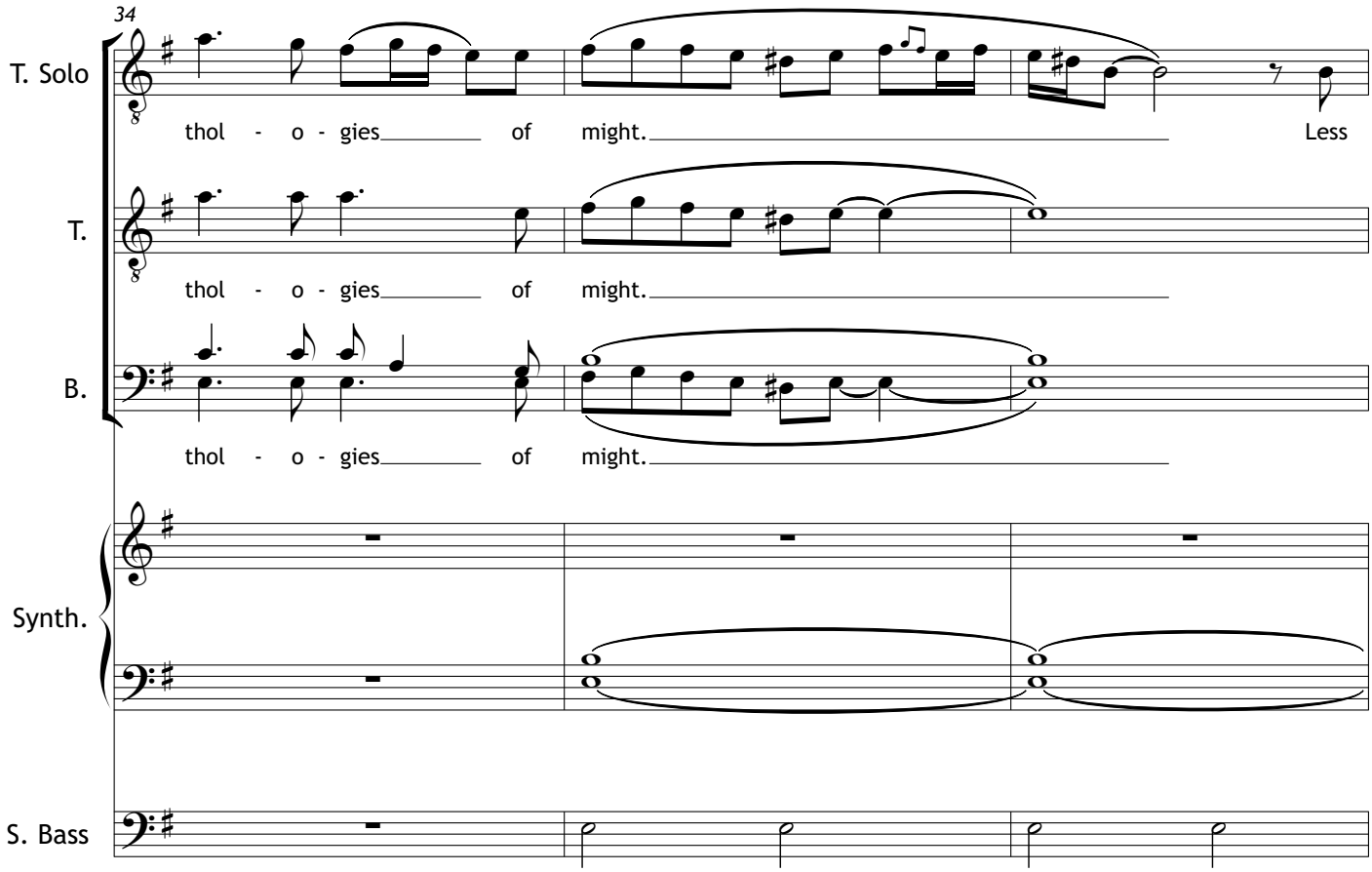

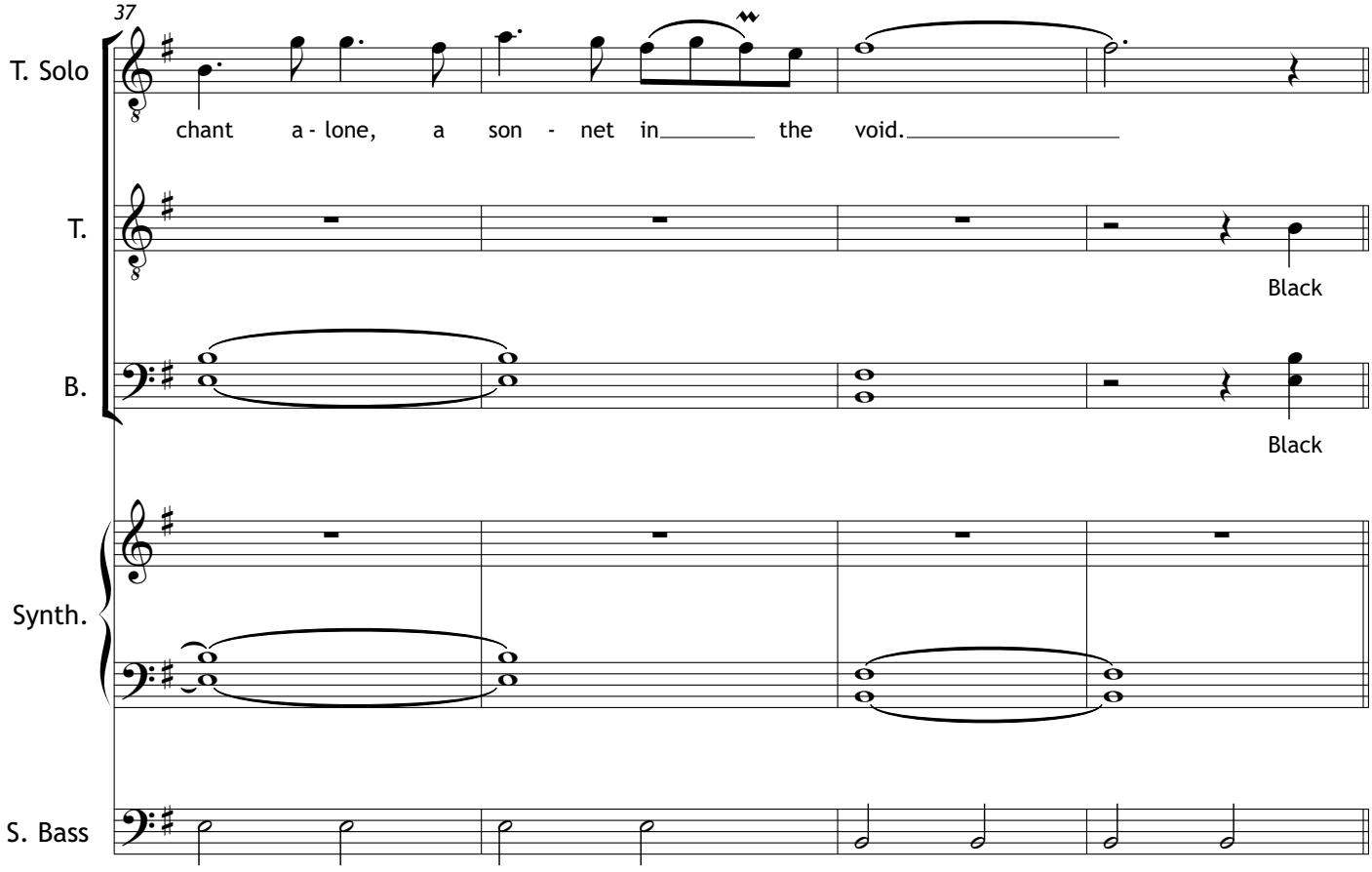

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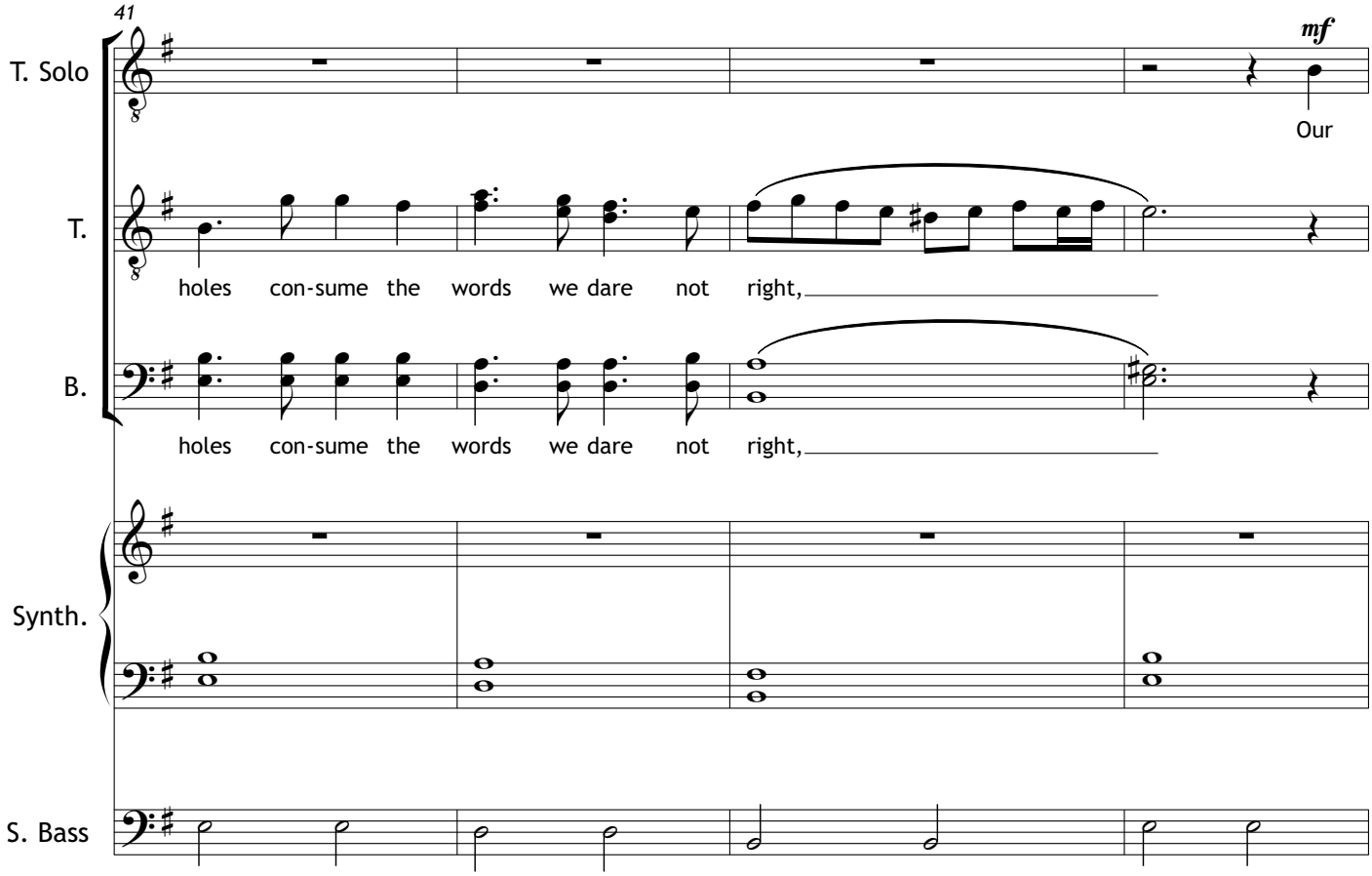

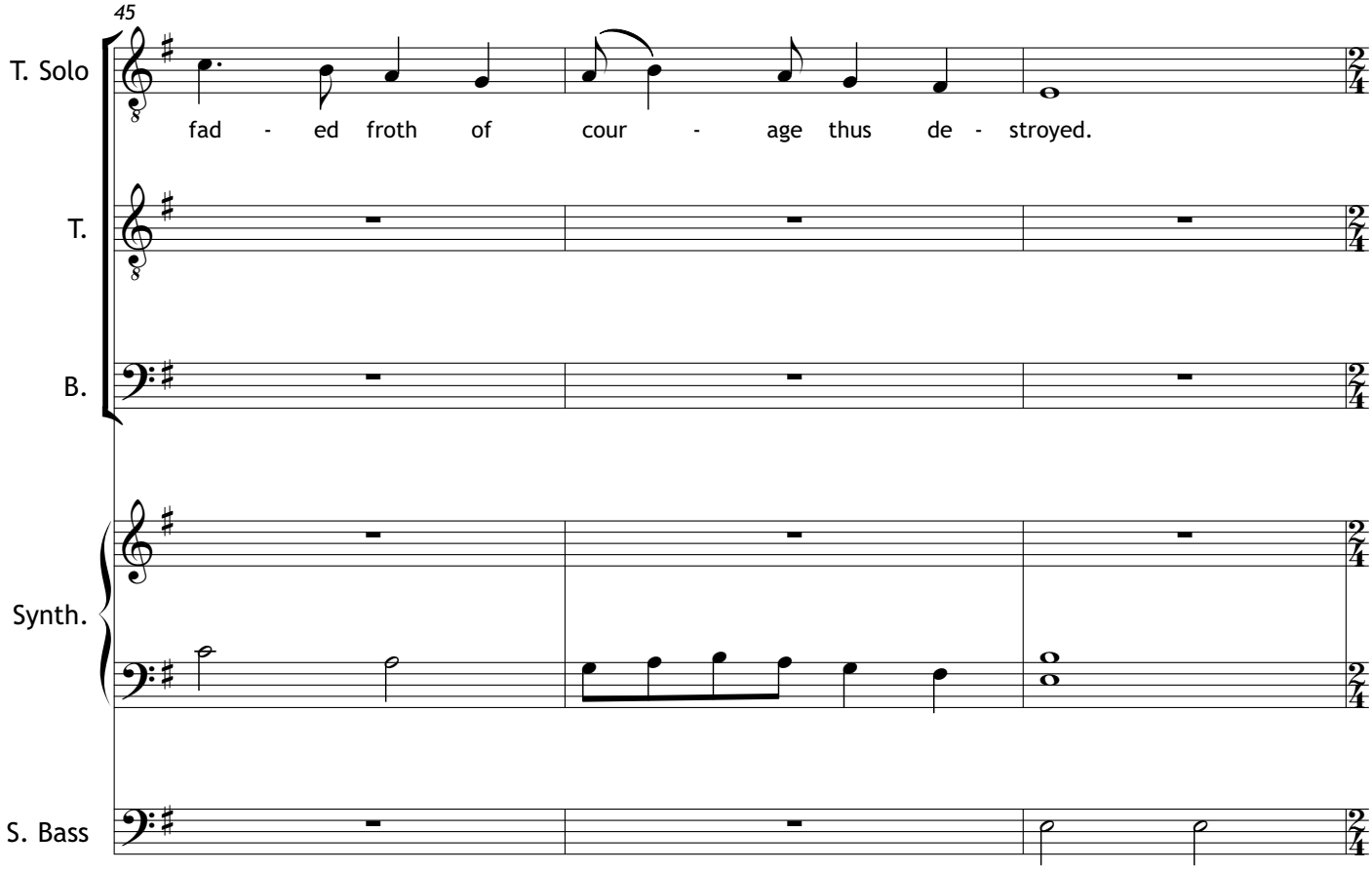

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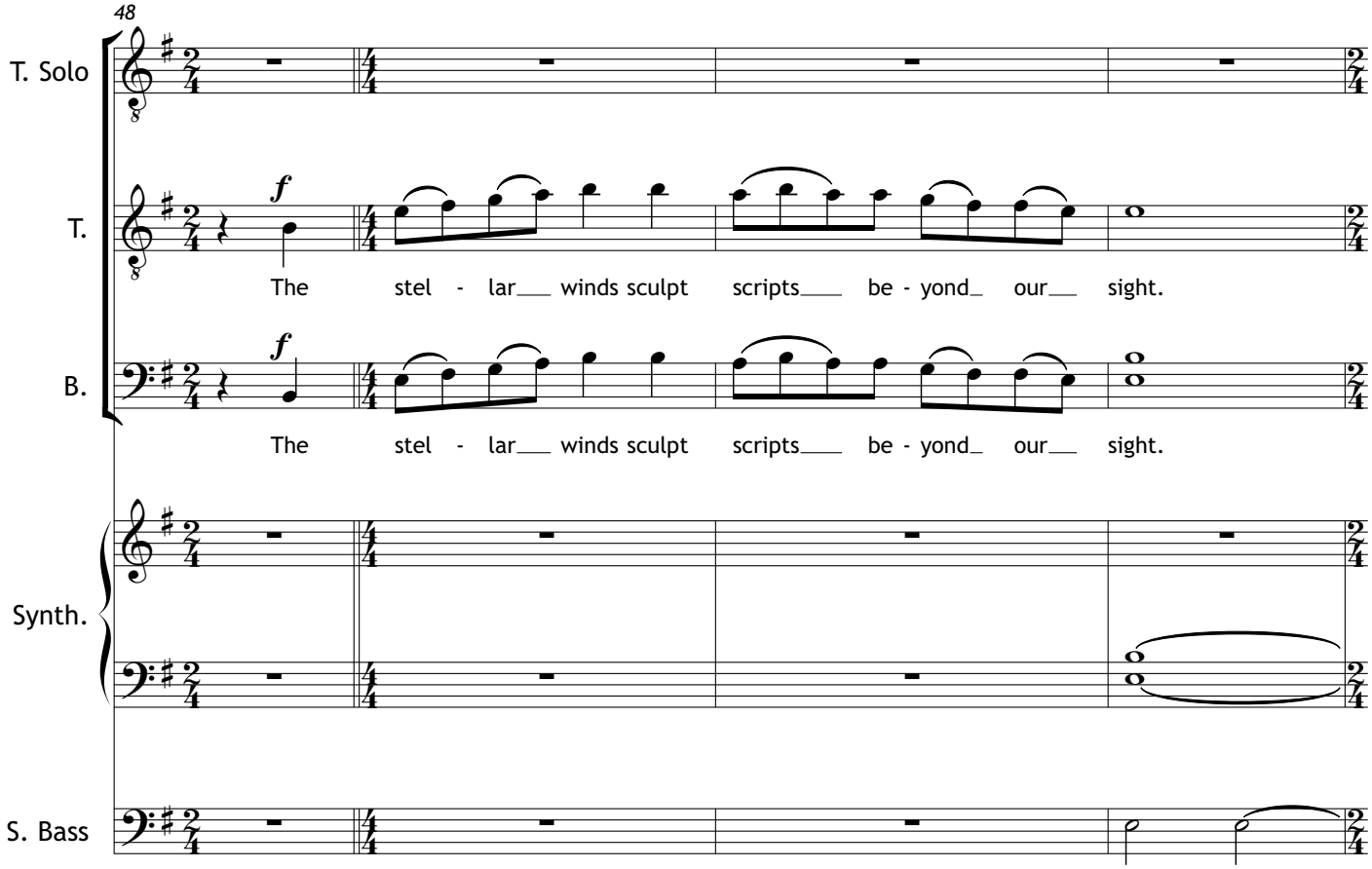

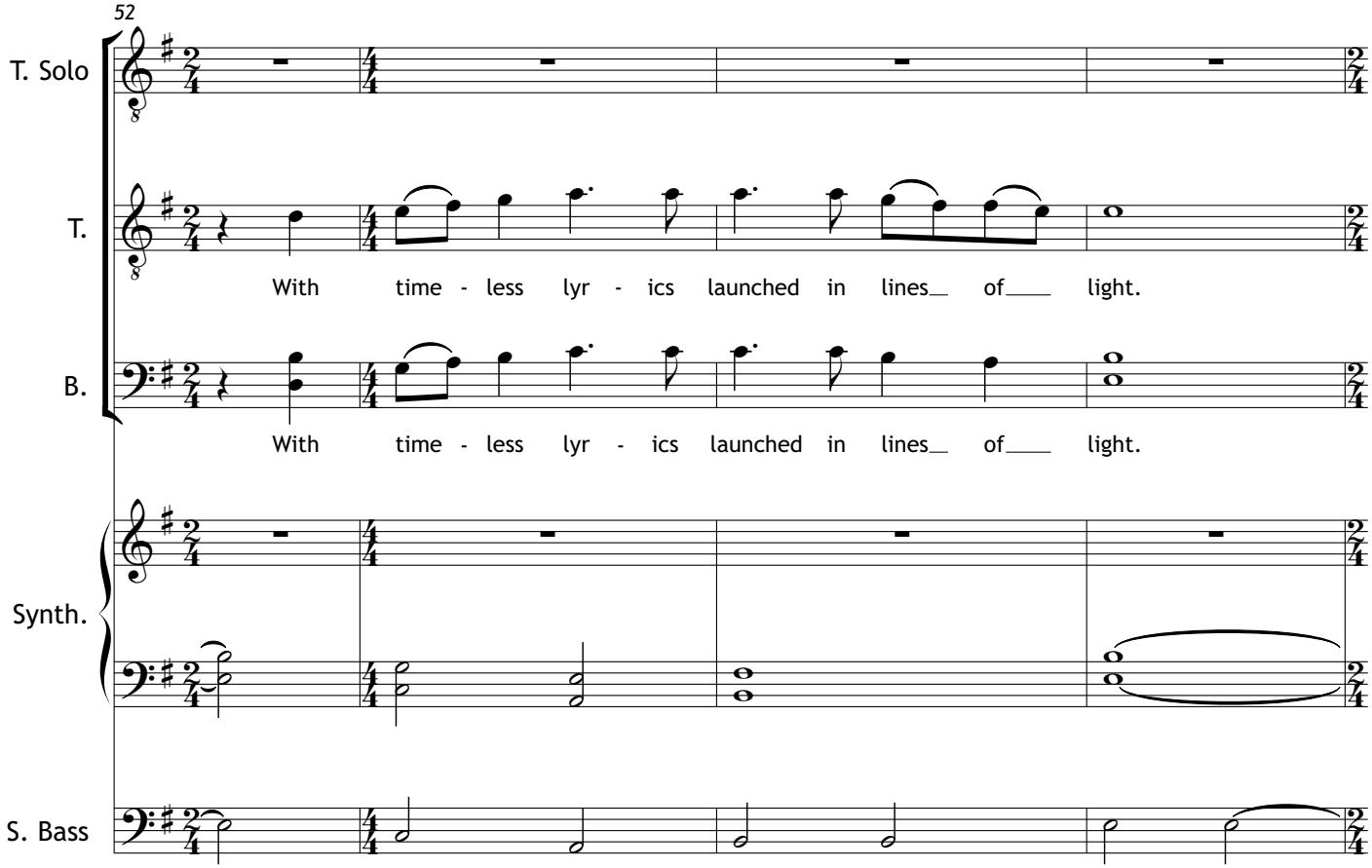

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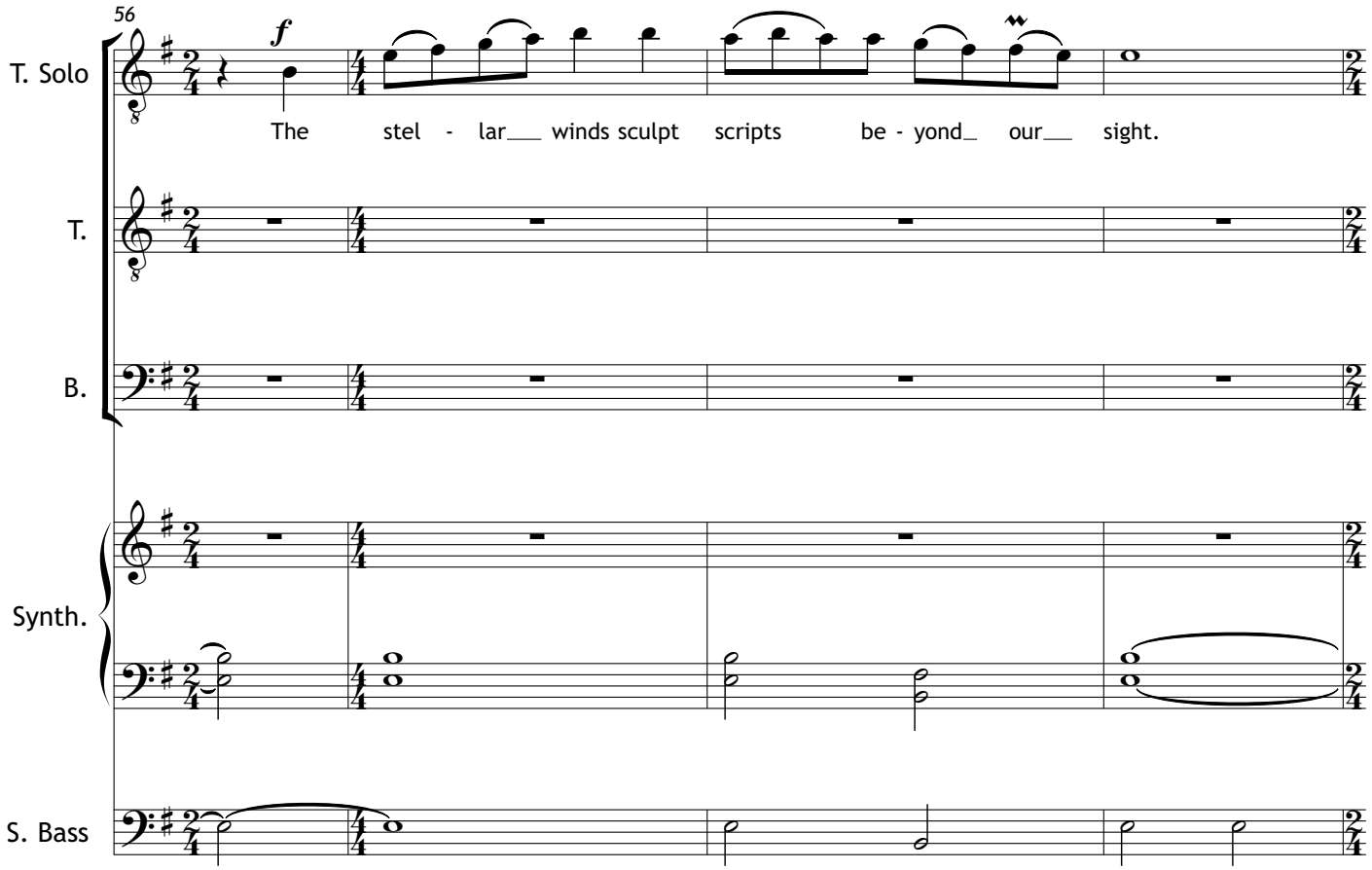

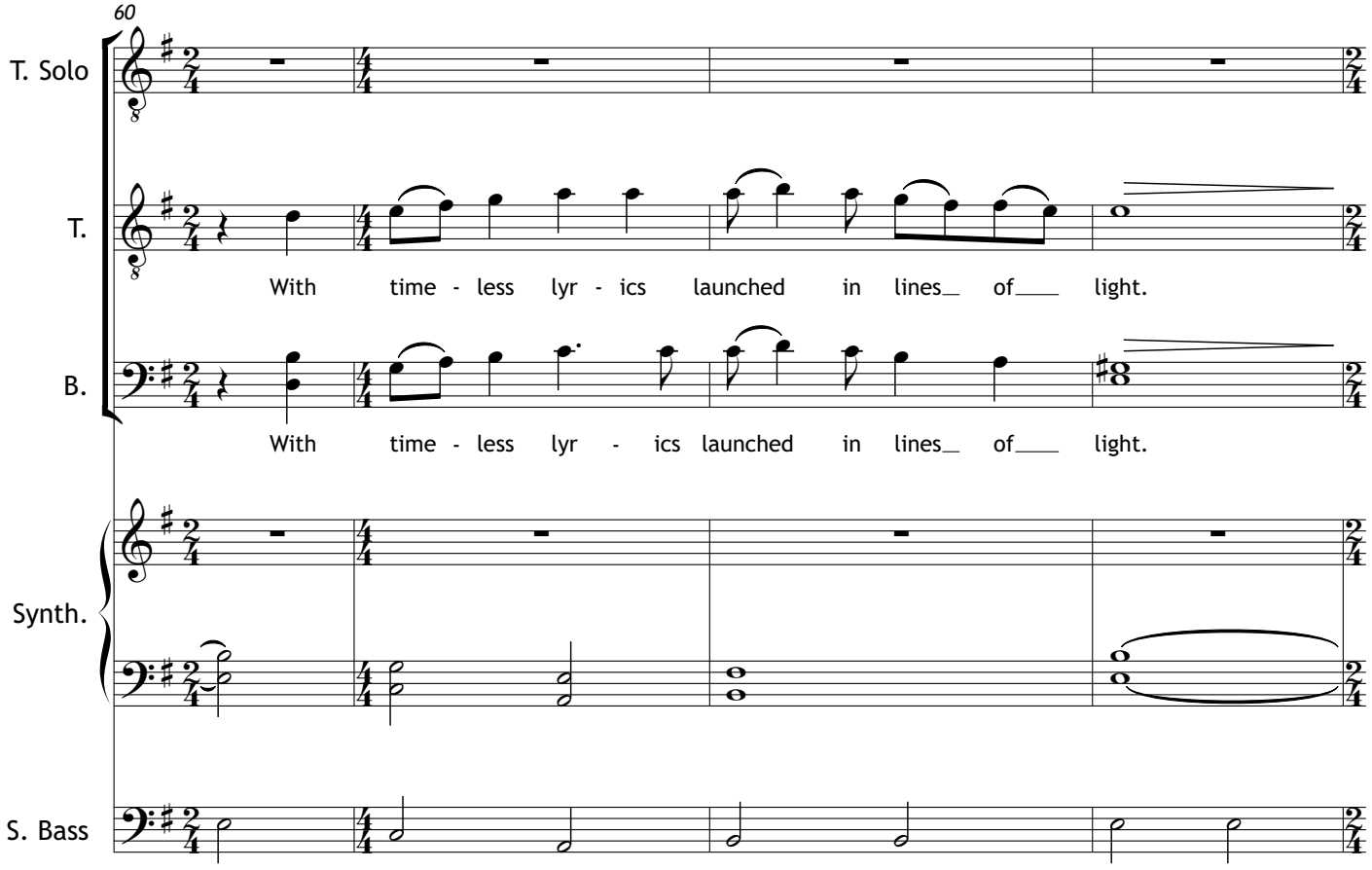

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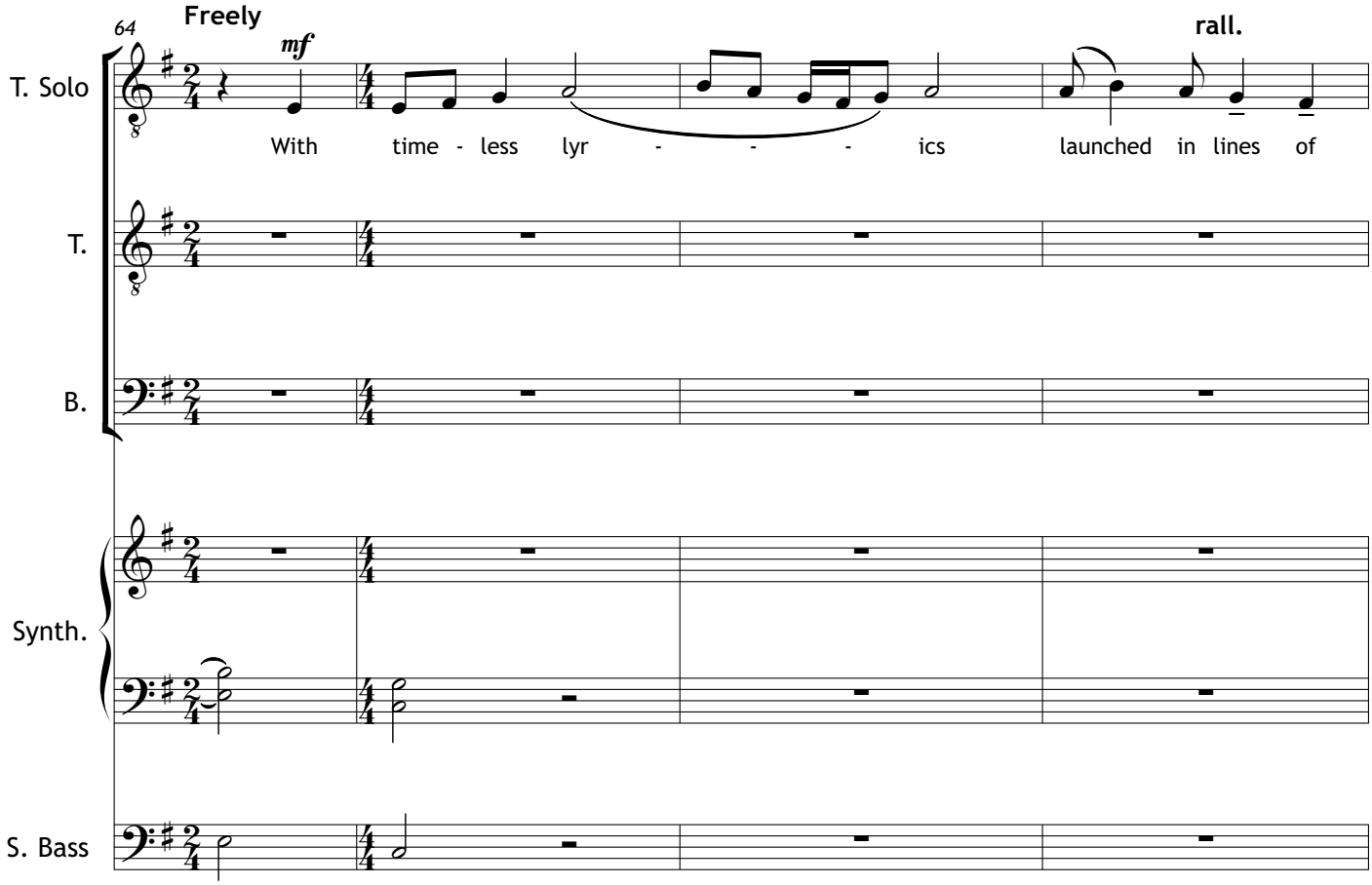

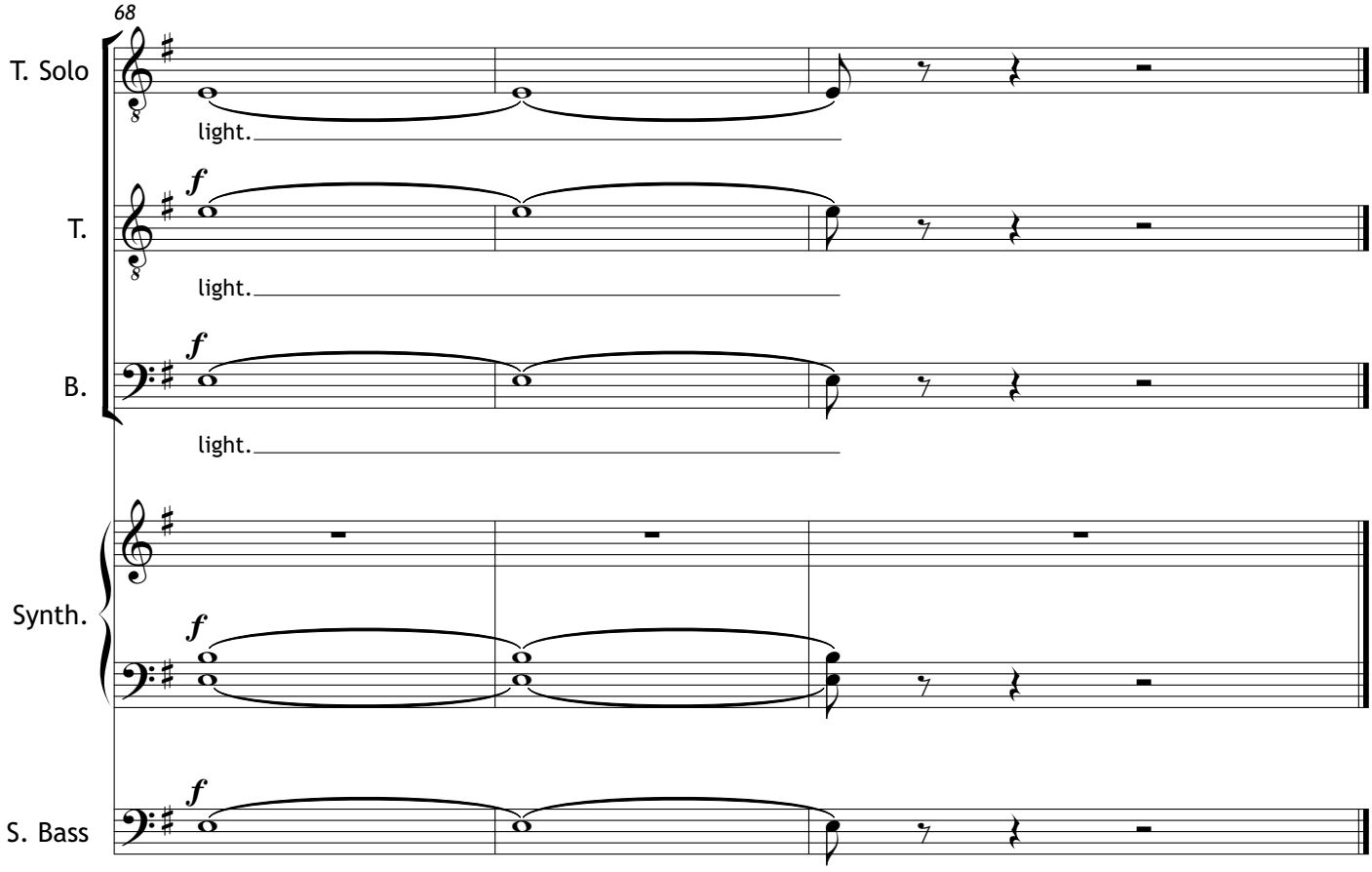

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3. Ainulindalë

Ainulindalë traces how the beloved came to inhabit Tolkien's legendarium in the poet's mind (his primary mythological framework developed in his youth), specifically tying her to the figure of Varda, Queen of the Stars (see "Some Background"). Those tales expanded to fill whatever subconscious human needs he had for mythology. Combined with a life-long love of astronomy and cosmology, his formative narratives and images centered around an odd combination of scientific naturalism (inspired especially by the heavens) and a literary mythos from Tolkien's writings.

When the Stargirl entered his life, he found that his beloved's name (a Hindu astrological term for a star system) resonated with this personal mythological structure. The poem begins with a celebration of Tolkien's musical story of creation. Music is the metaphor of creation in the universe of Tolkien's cosmogenesis. "Ainulindalë" means "The Music of the Ainur," and is a chapter in "The Silmarillion" (Tolkien's great mythic book) presenting an account of this musical creation by the angelic powers.

Altogether, this sonnet explores how personal interests in music, astronomy, and the mythic architecture of Tolkien's legends interwove with the conceptual and emotional space created by the poet's beloved. This is most strongly realized in the figure of Varda, a transcendent figure in the legendarium especially connected to the stars and with whom his beloved was identified in his imagination.

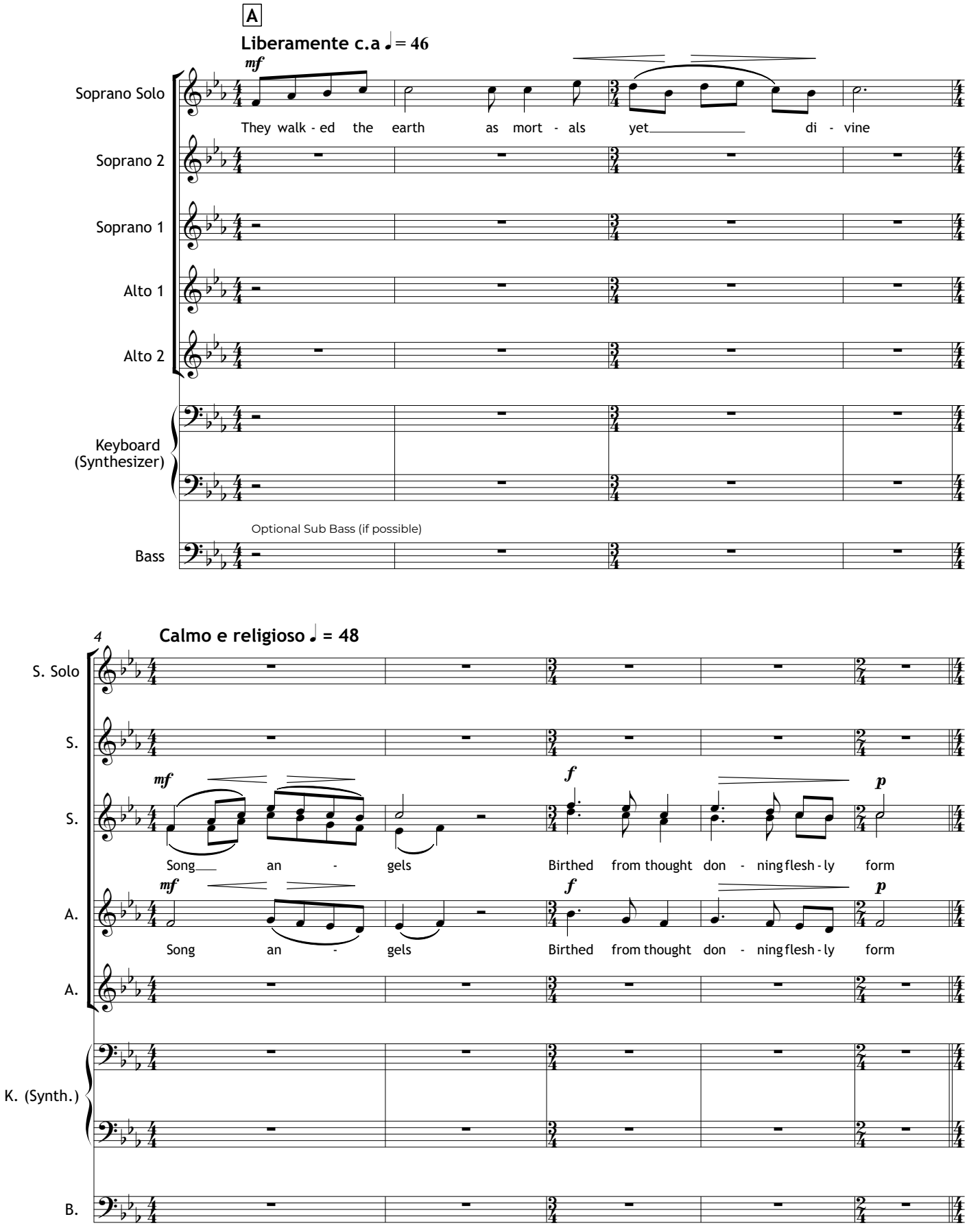
It unfolds in the first quatrain with a presentation of the Ainur and the Ainulindalë ("*And from their dreams, the cosmos would be born"*). The second quatrain focuses from the Valar in general to the specific figure of Varda, establishing her title and connection to light. The third quatrain then incarnates Varda in the form of a generative Bharatanatyam dancer, fashioning the stars in her choreography. This ties together in the poet's mind the mythic icon of the Star Queen with the person of his beloved, the Stargirl. In the couplet, the poet steps back with some self-awareness of his demented myth-making, confessing he is at some level conscious of the mental machinations involved in elevating his beloved to an impossible state.

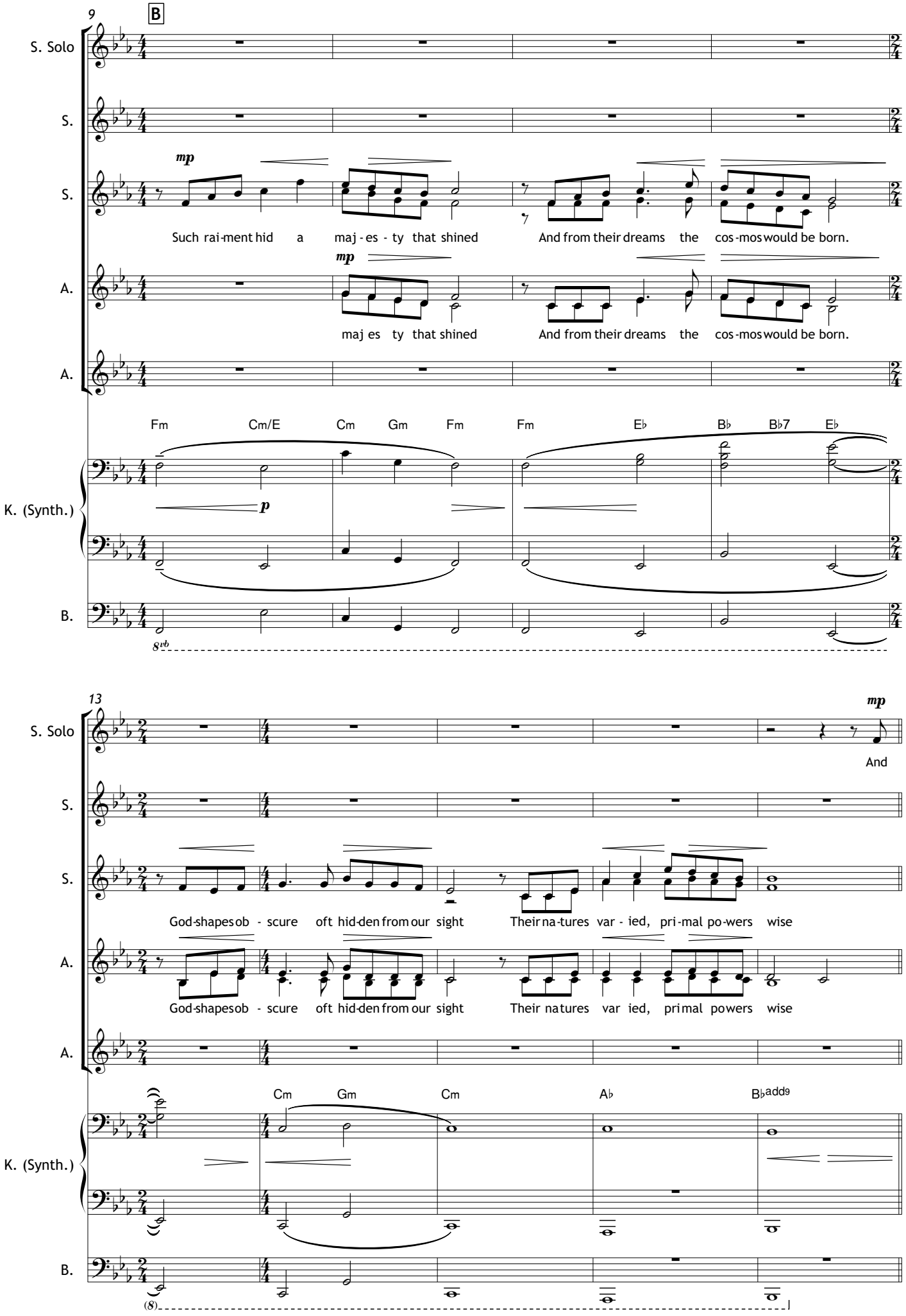
Ainulindalë

Anthesis: Item 1 of "Tome of Stars"

Stargazer

Choir SATB and Keyboard (Synth)





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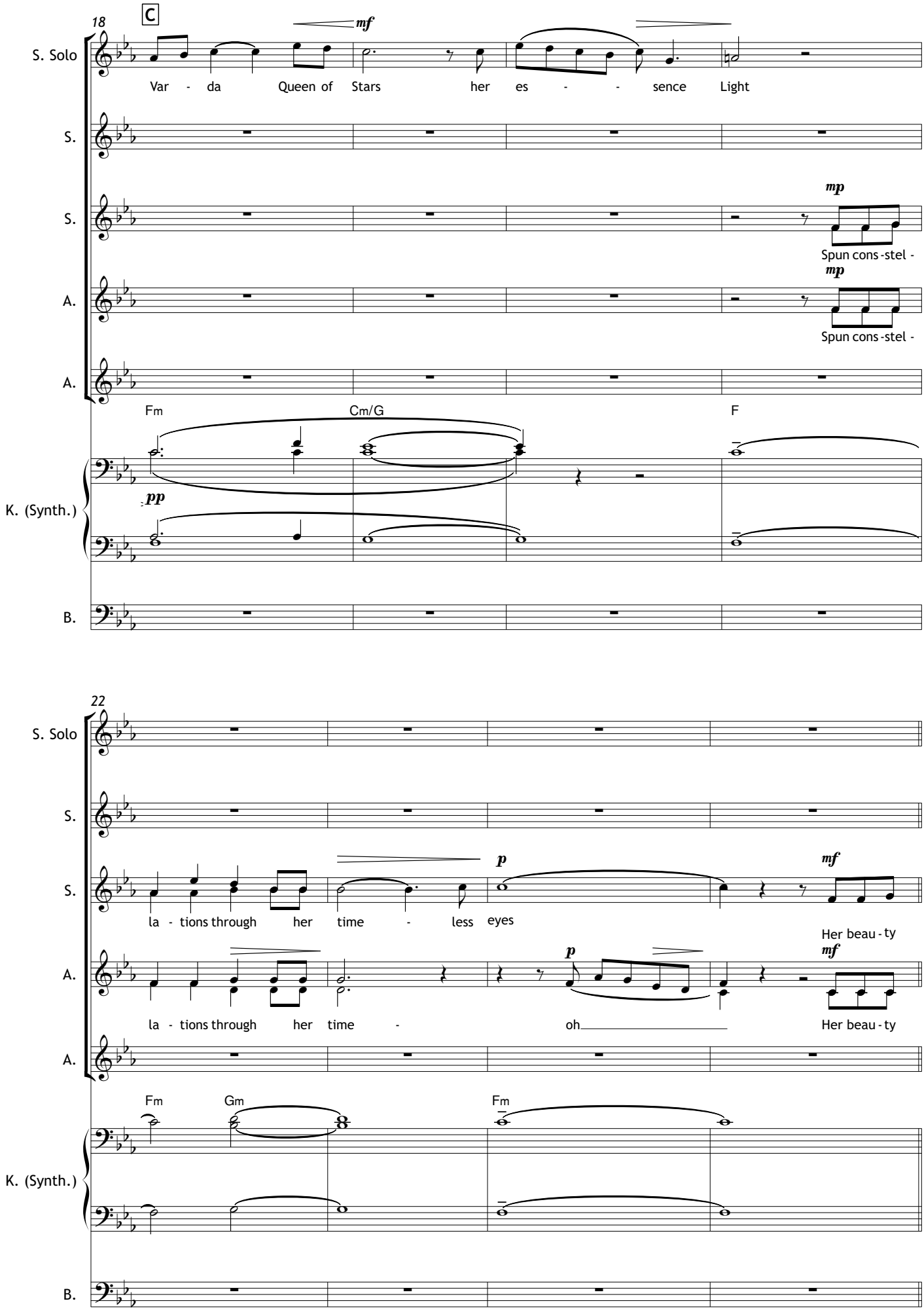

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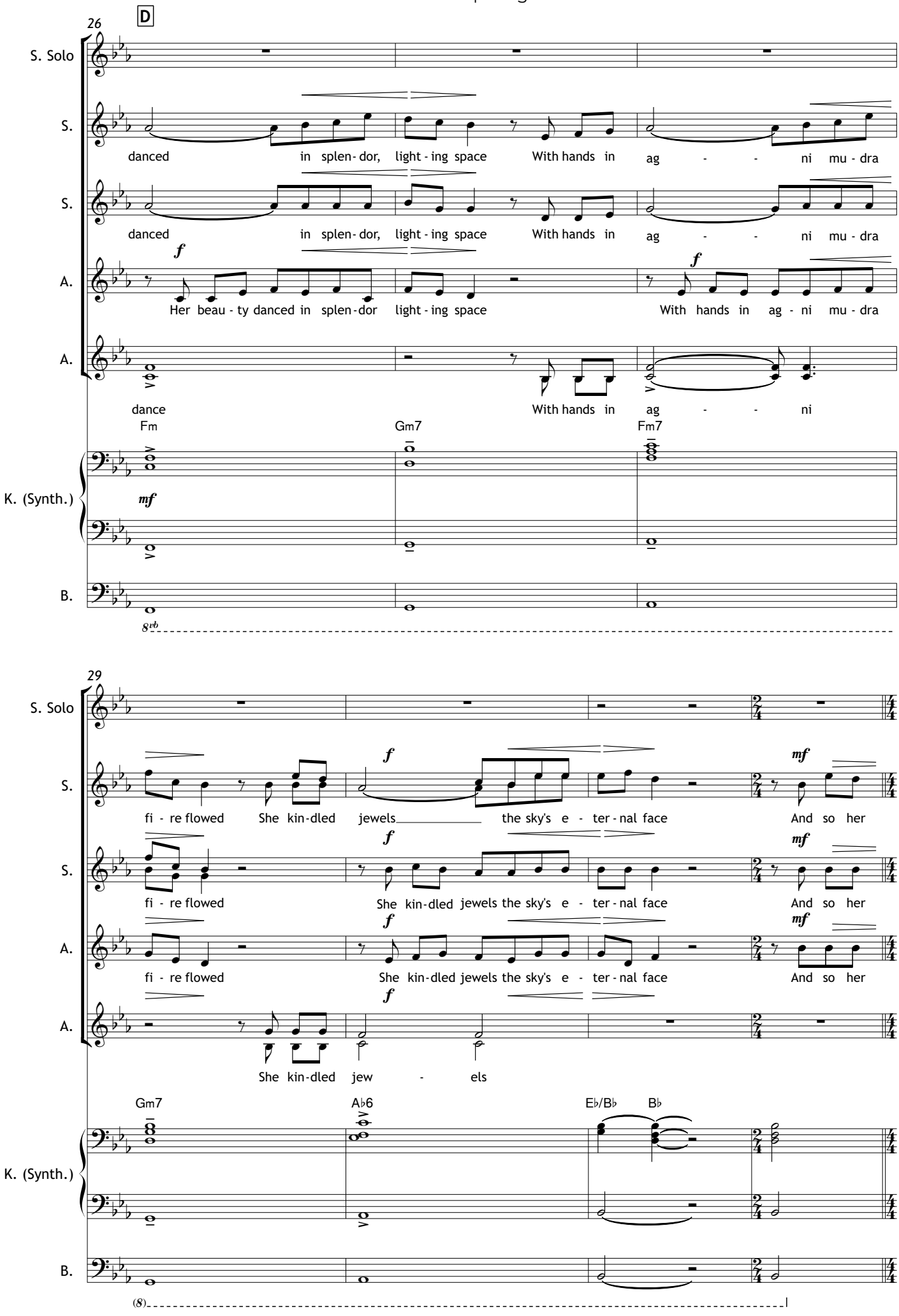

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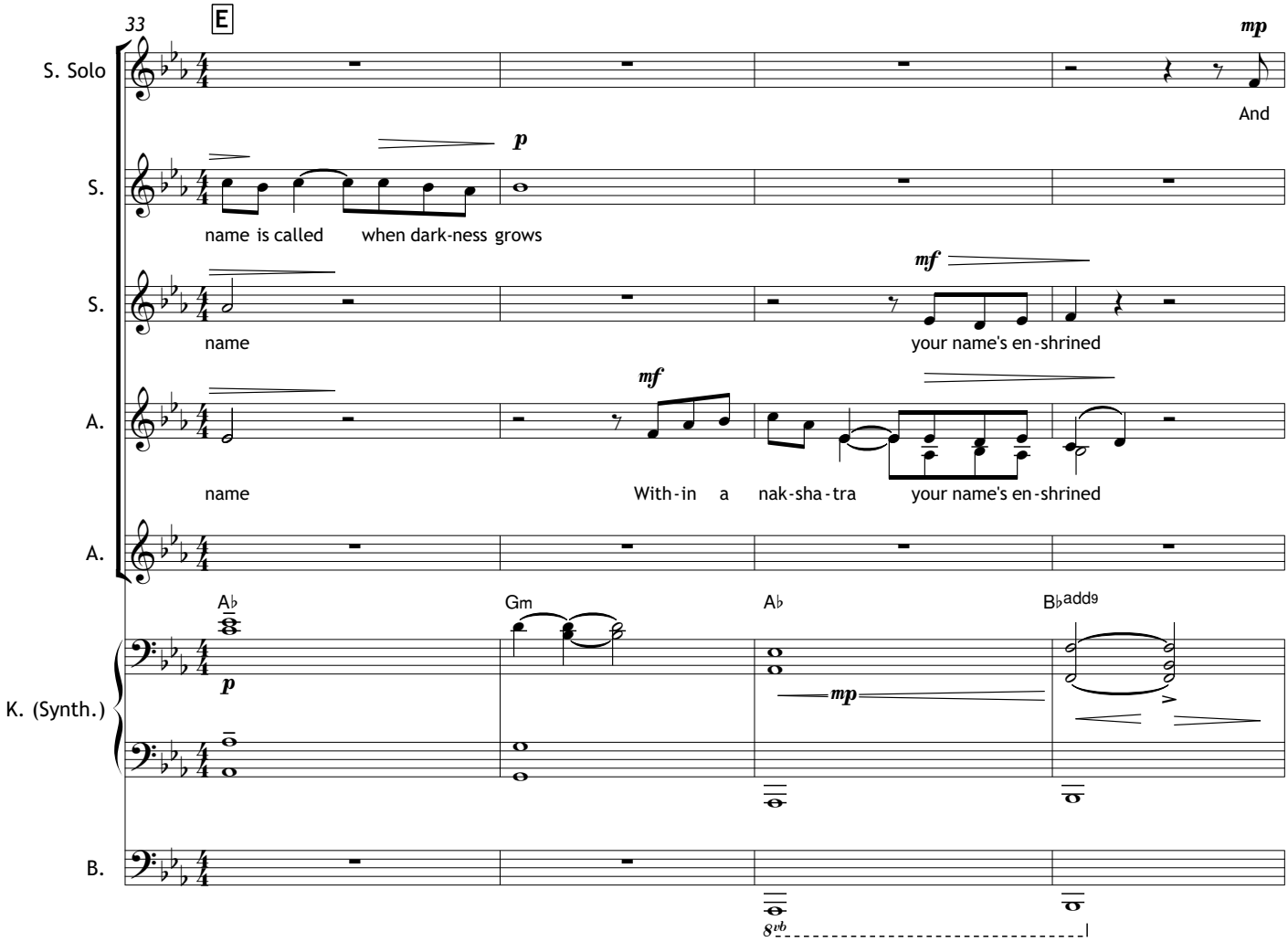
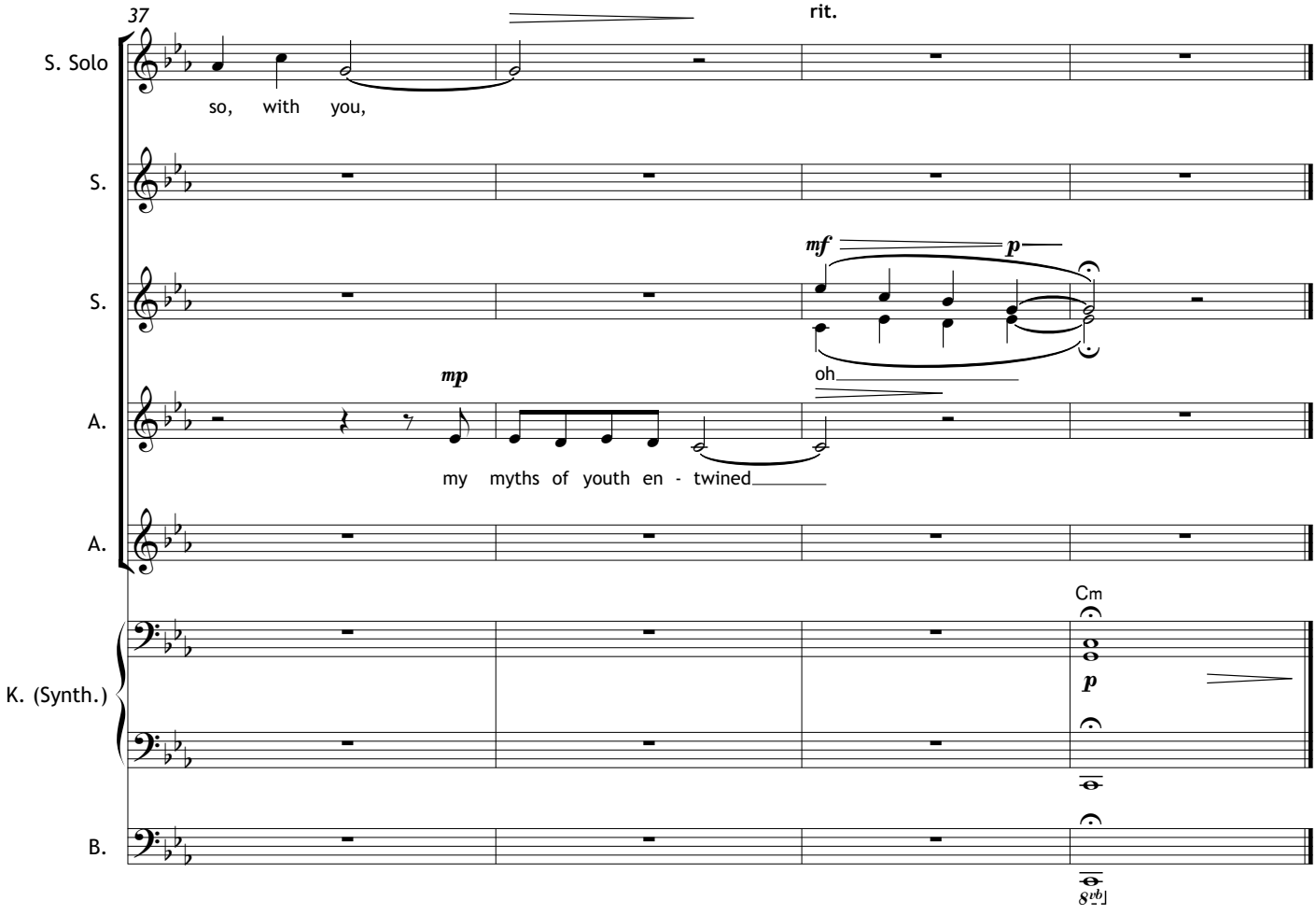




CC0 2026 - Stargarzer

4. Vox Animi

Vox Animi (Latin for “the voice of the soul”) is about the beloved's voice, both concretely and metaphorically. The song describes the melodic quality of her speech but also treats it symbolically, reflecting her elevated nature and creativity. Those aspects are painted in divine and cosmic dimensions. Her speech becomes a metaphor for a force of primal essence that can silence gods and stir stars.

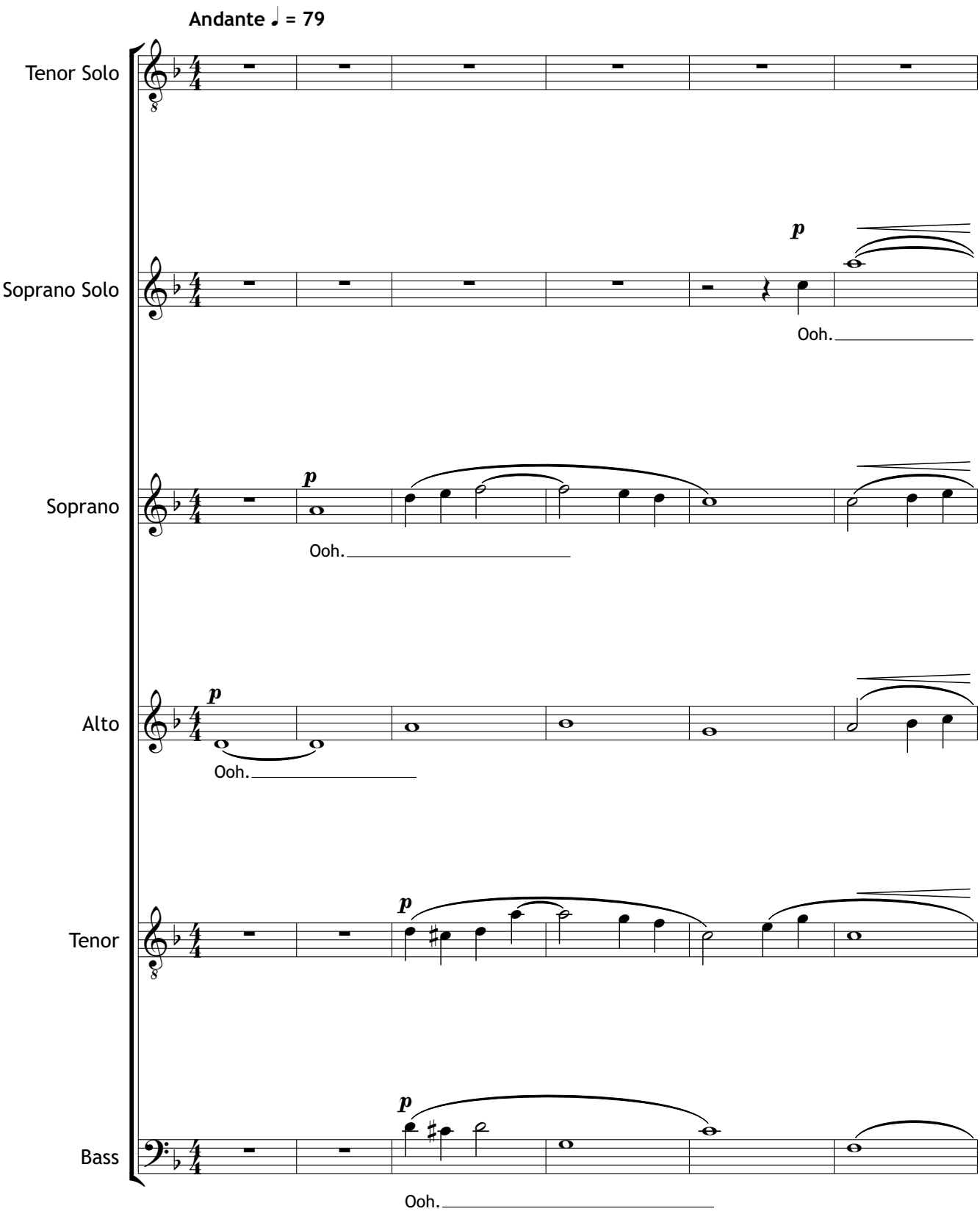
While evidently hyperbole, there seemed to be no other way to describe the impact she had on him. “Reasonable” words seemed dead and distorting on the page, a lie far worse than exaggeration. At least in overstatement, a more mythical truth was give the respect it deserved.

Vox Animi

Anthesis: Item 1 of "Tome of Stars"

Stargazer

Vocal Ensemble



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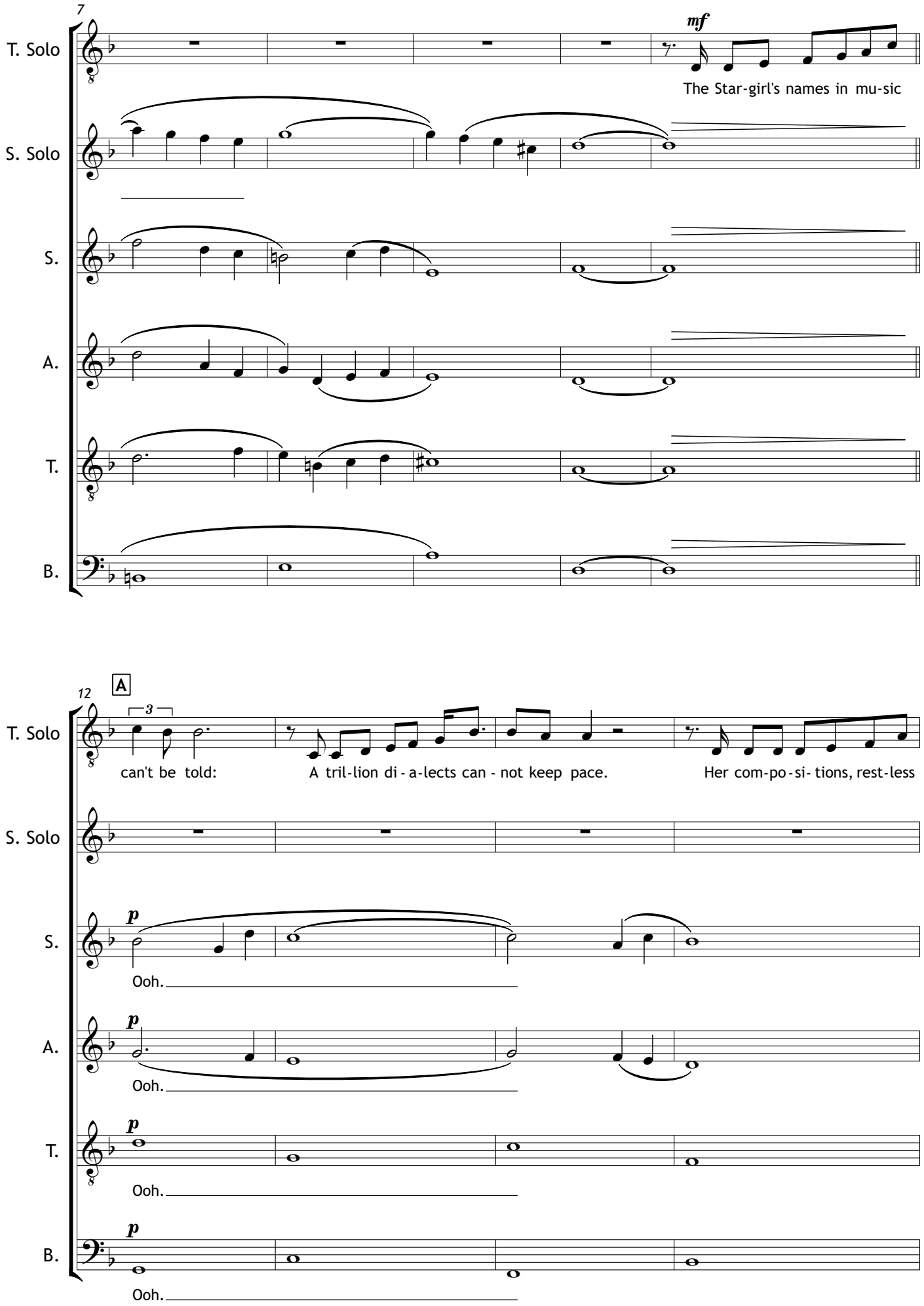

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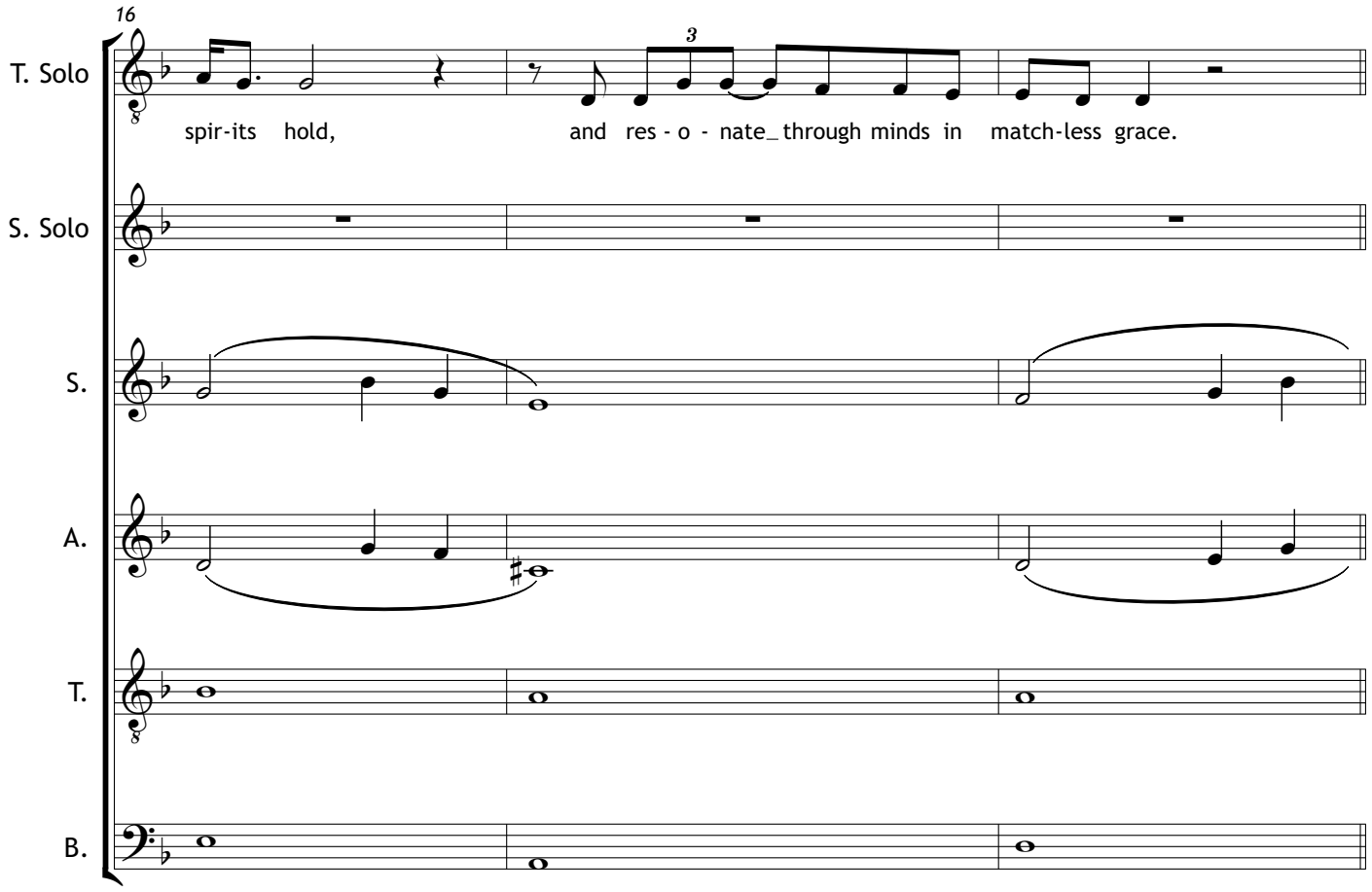

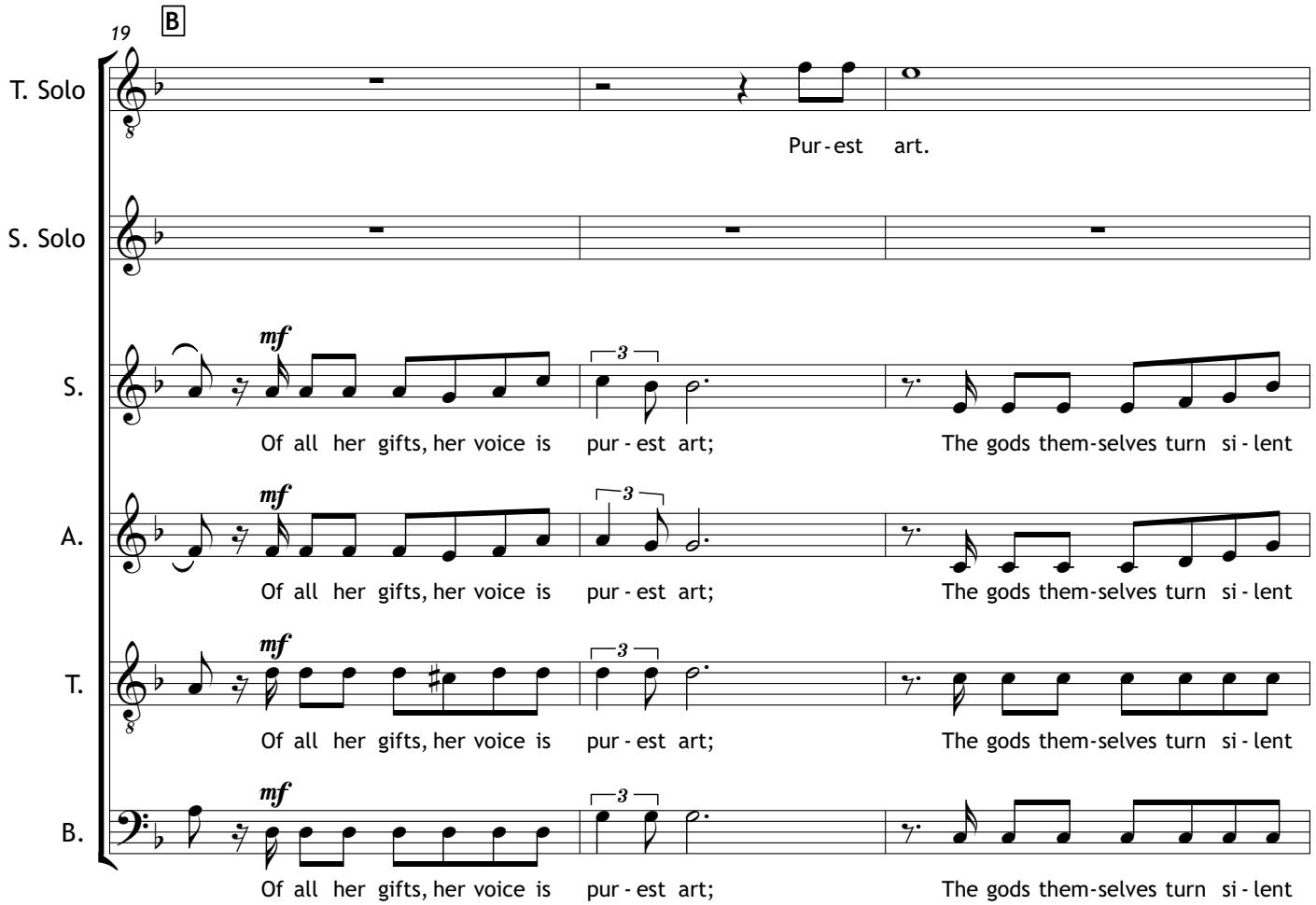

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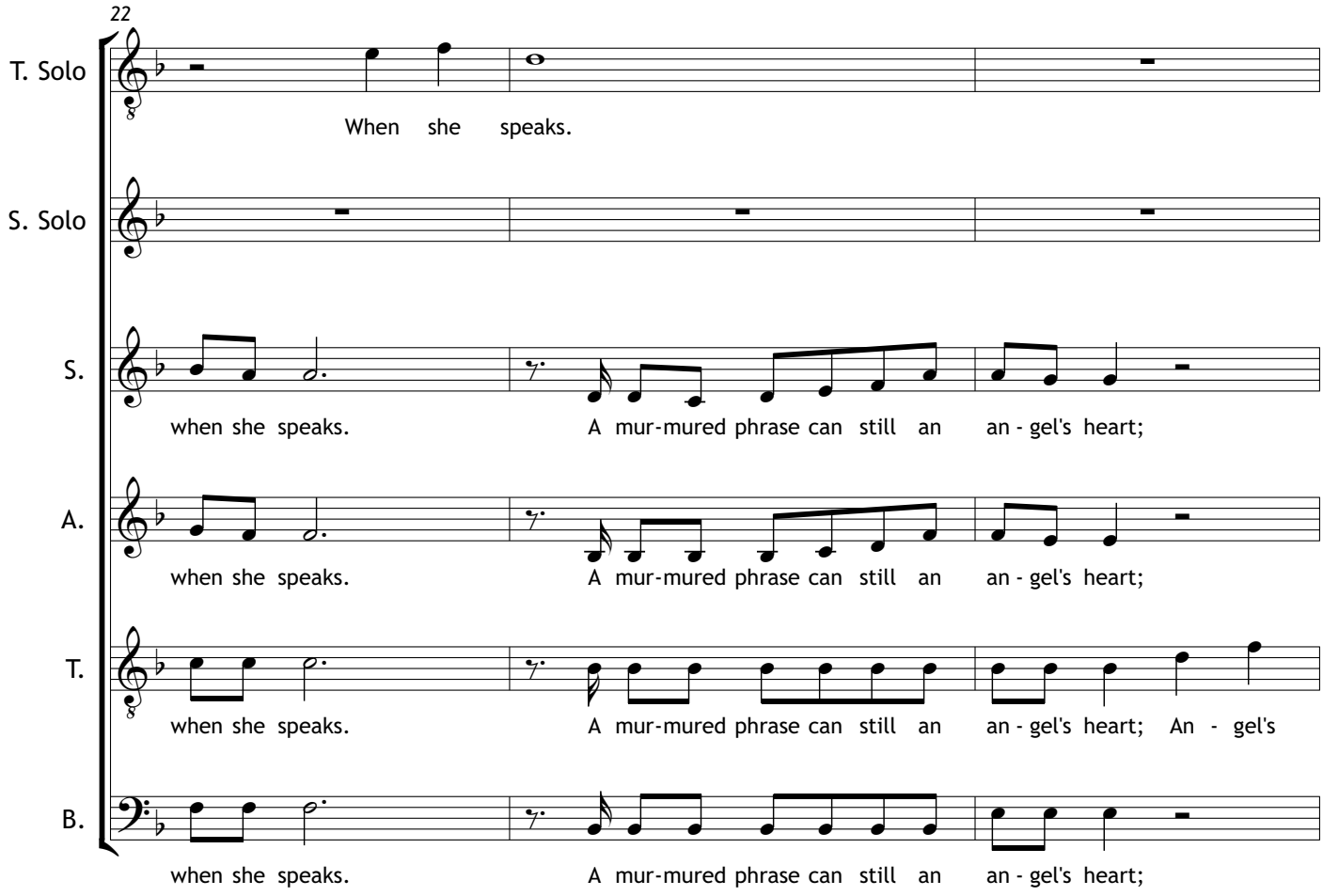

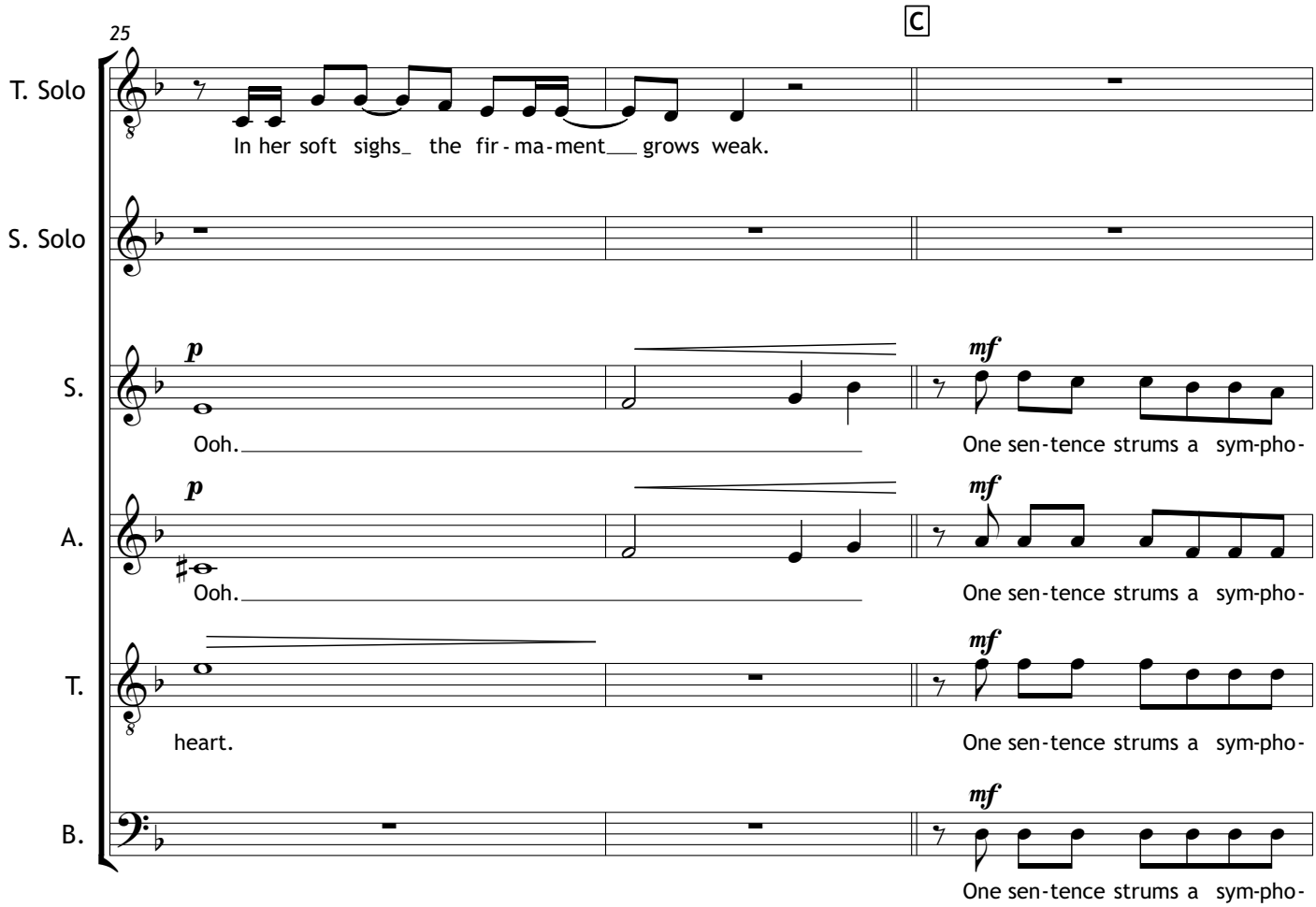

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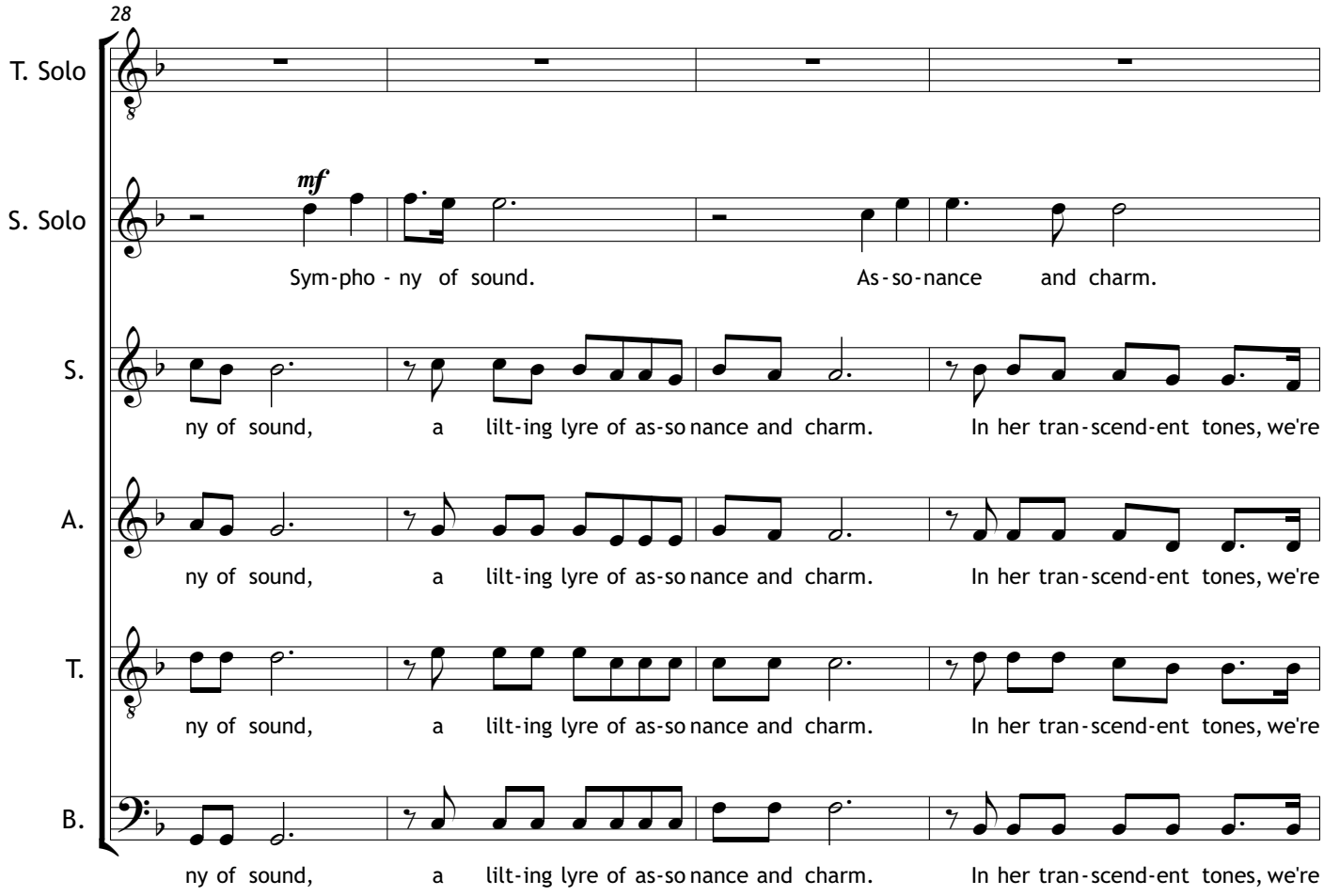

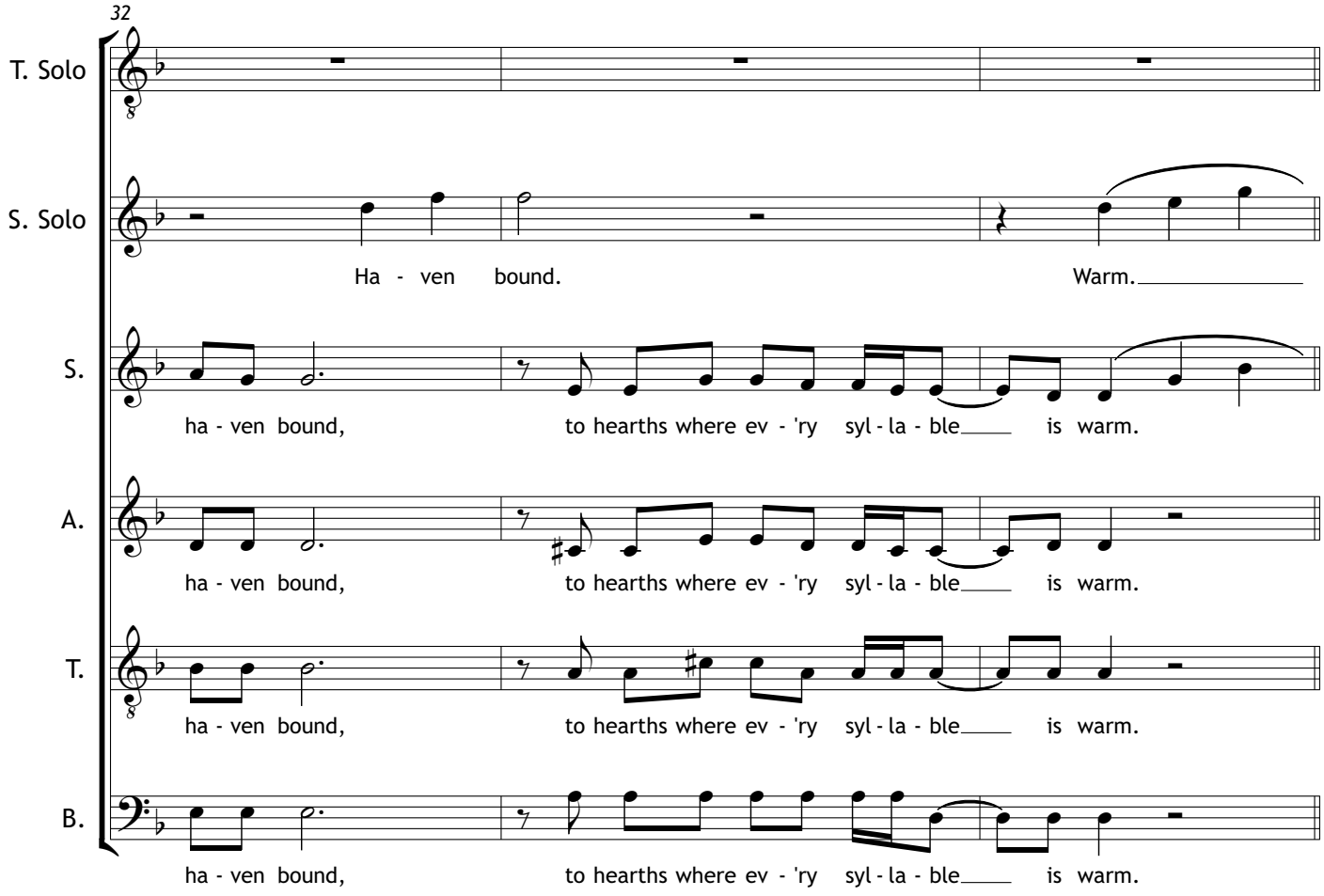

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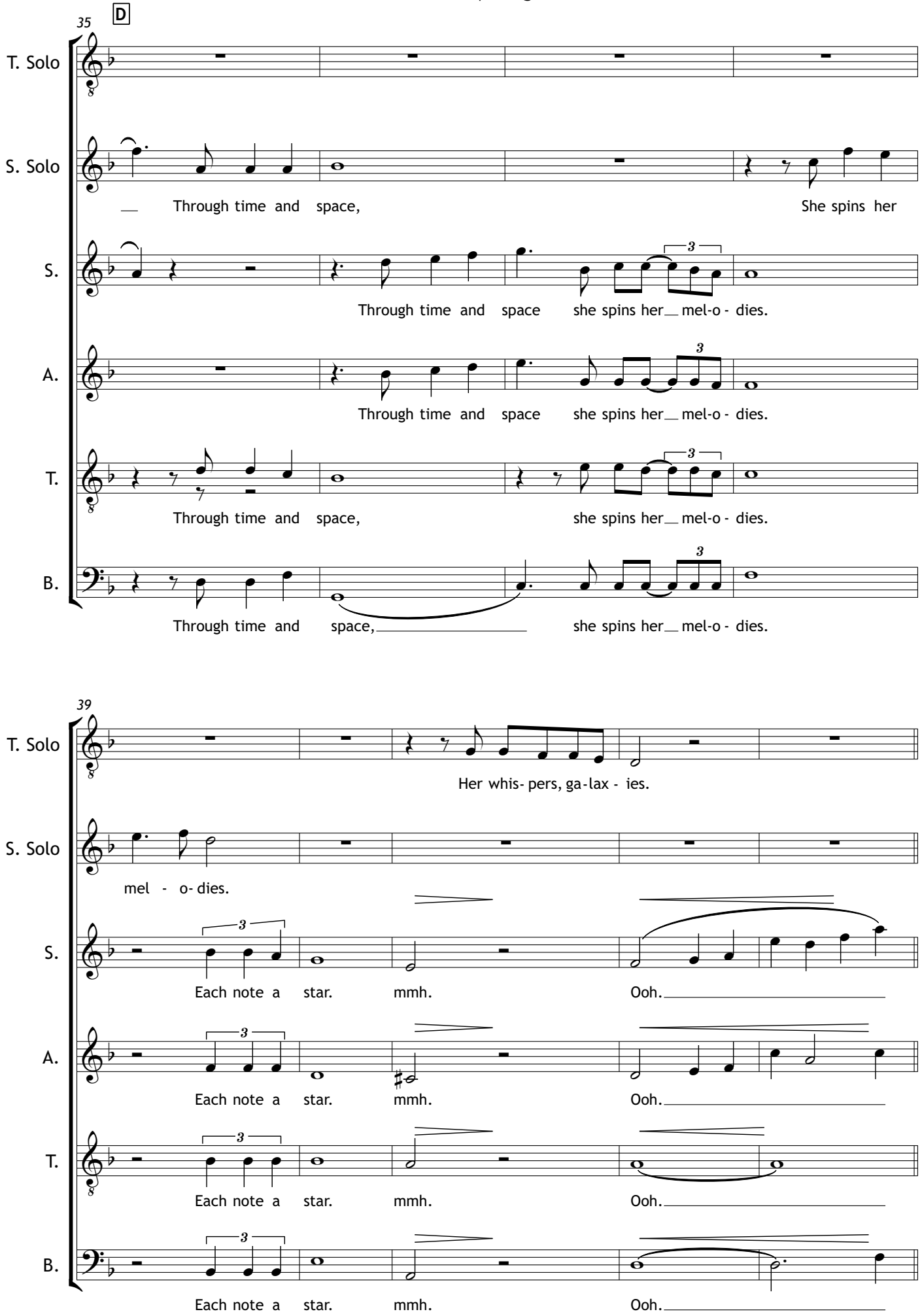

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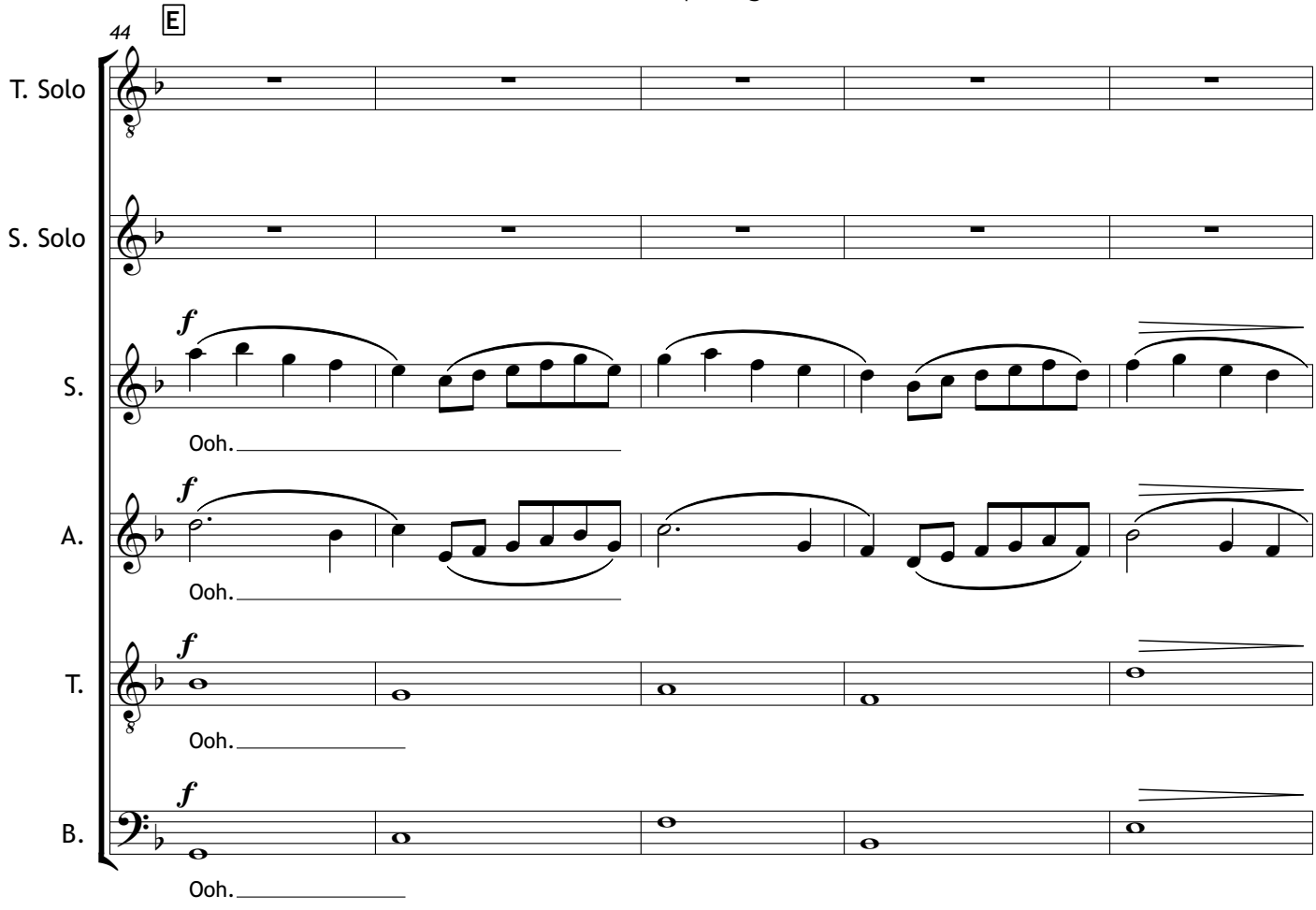

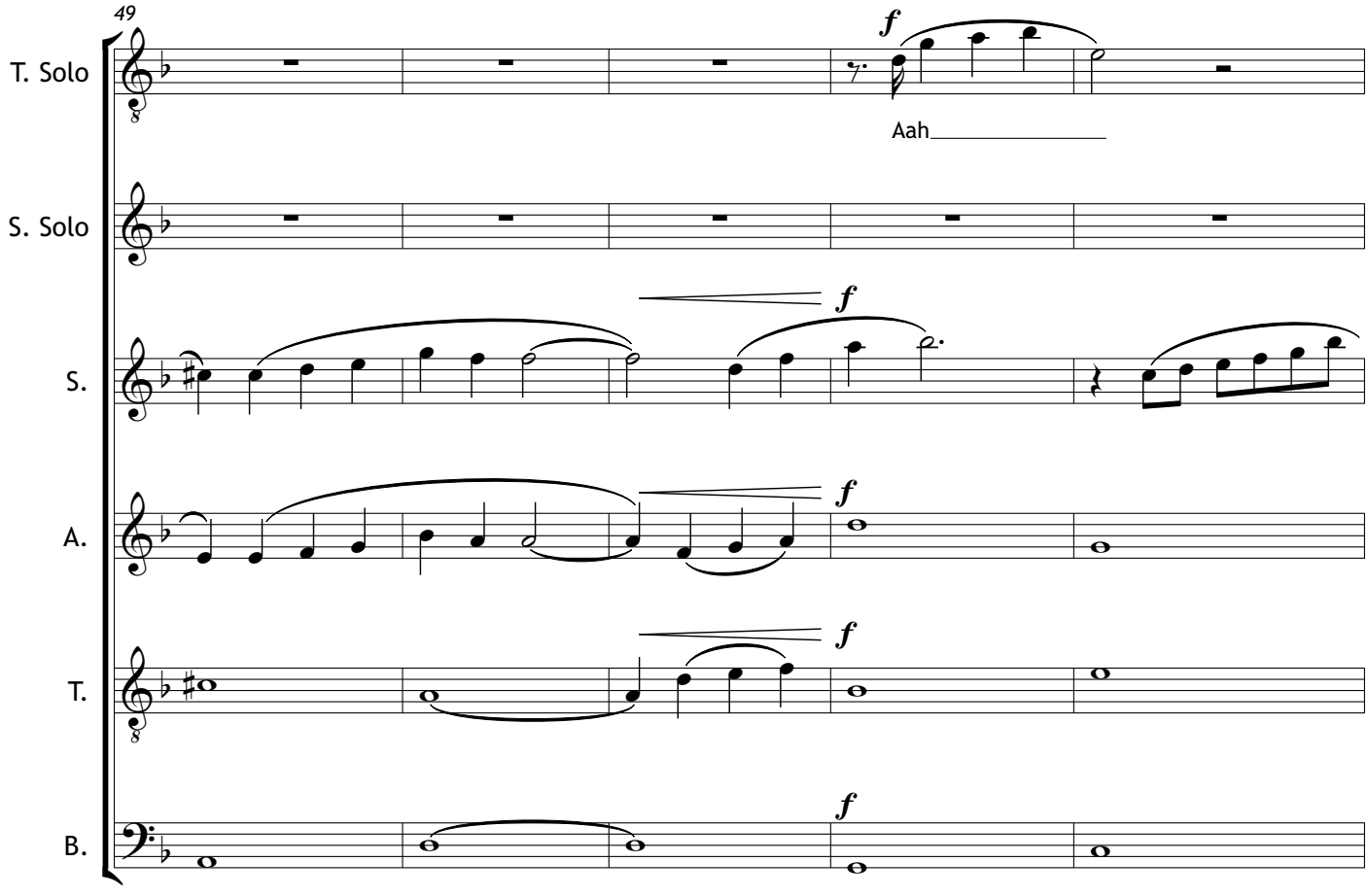

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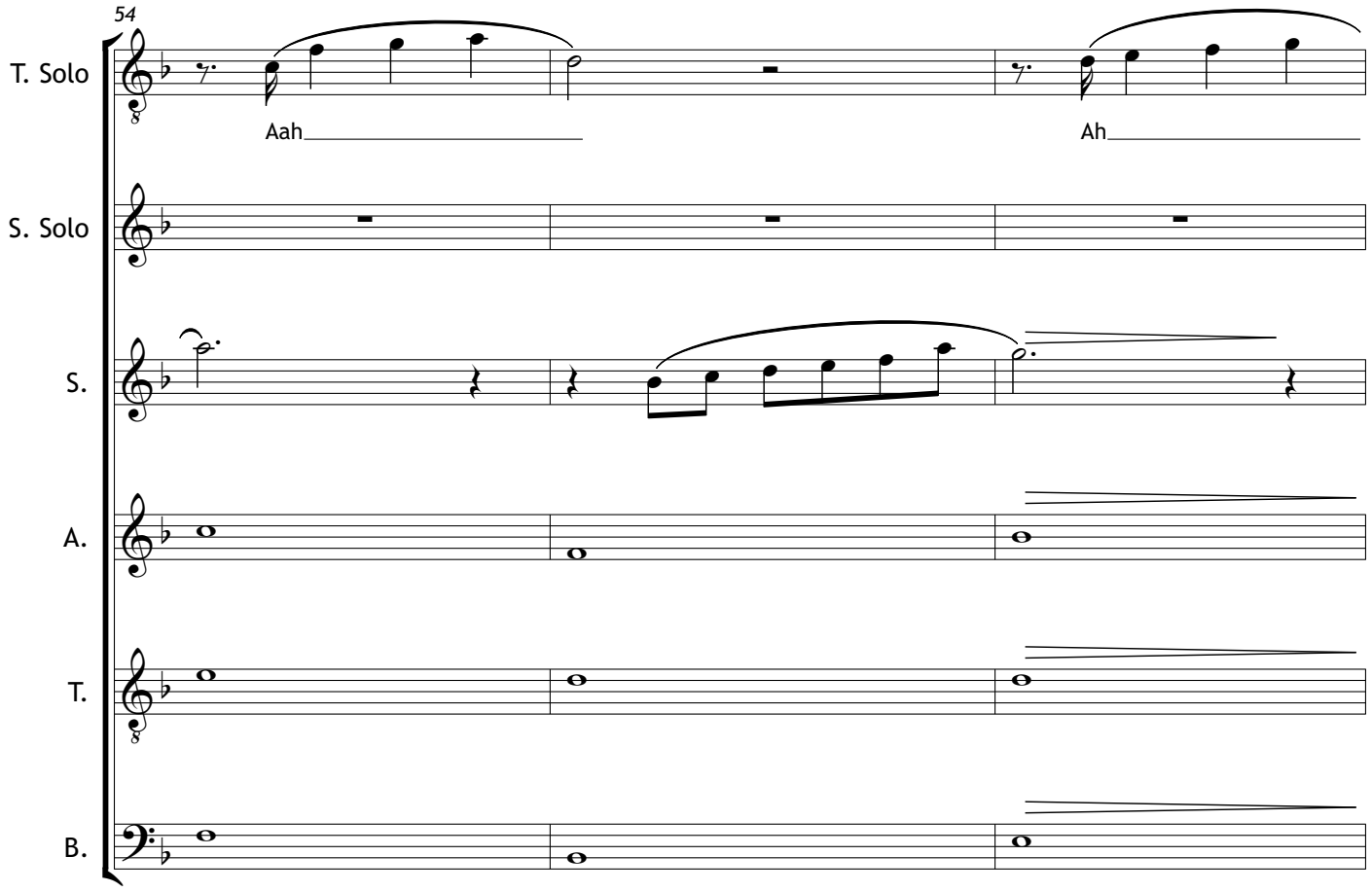
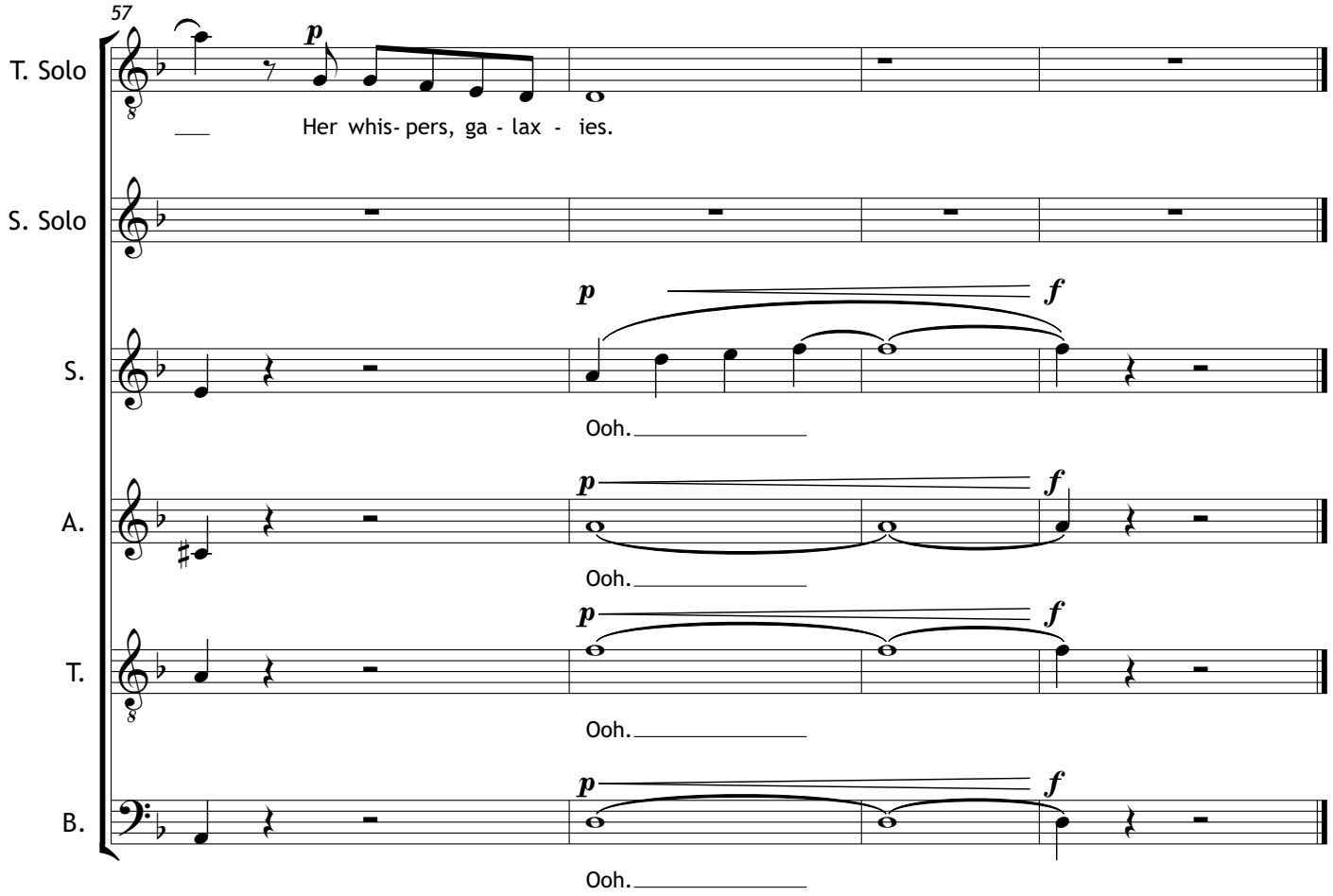

54
T. Solo
Aah
Ah
S. Solo
S.
A.
T.
B.


57
T. Solo
p
Her whis- pers, ga - lax - ies.
S. Solo
S.
p
f
Ooh.
A.
Ooh.
T.
Ooh.
B.
Ooh.

5. Shlokam

A shloka/shlokam is a devotional verse in Sanskrit. It is also an optional item in the margam of a Bharatanatyam dance recital. It is usually performed without strict rhythmic elements, allowing the dancer the freedom to interpret its meaning in expressive choreography.

In *Tome of Stars*, the poem *Shlokam* introduces the fifth Item *Quixotosis*. It establishes the poet's complete and utter devotion to the Stargirl despite her departure from his life. She is presented in perhaps the most elevated, poetic cosmological imagery in the collection. She is the generative point of his comprehension of reality: *"Through you alone, the cosmos I'm aware."* Galaxies spin in her eyes, the *"spice of stars"* is in her hair, she wraps *"philosophy in quantum codes"* while *"theology itself blooms"* from her. Tying her to the classical Indian dancer, the verse notes that *"the mind of matter dusts your dashing feet/Existence resonates from ankle bells."*

The ending is a conceptual Möbiusloop, where creation, *"the smile of Stargirl's whims,"* has its *"end beginning ever in her hymns."* These lines also hold a direct and personal application to Stargazer as well: his everyday life, his emotions, his thoughts during every hour of every day of every month of every year, all are fundamentally, generatively impacted by *whatever* the Stargirl wishes to do. Her *"whims"*— be they her continued silence to him, acidic responses, performance in public dance recitals, research in her field and publishing — this is his reality, orbiting her choices because he has no other option. His creation, awareness, and reality, they are from her desires and actions. Whether or not she smiles about it all, he doesn't know.

With this sonnet, the poet plants a flag in the realm of utter worshipful devotion. And while he will have other doubts and trials, he establishes that the beloved will always have this kind of transcendental impact on him. It is not a transient state of "being in love." It is something stitched into the fabric of his being. He has no choice, and here, he accepts the reality of that fully, even celebrates it as he simultaneously mourns.

He chose the title to reflect this spiritual/emotional foundation. Like a shlokam in Indian tradition, the poem expresses a deep existential truth for him.

Shlokam

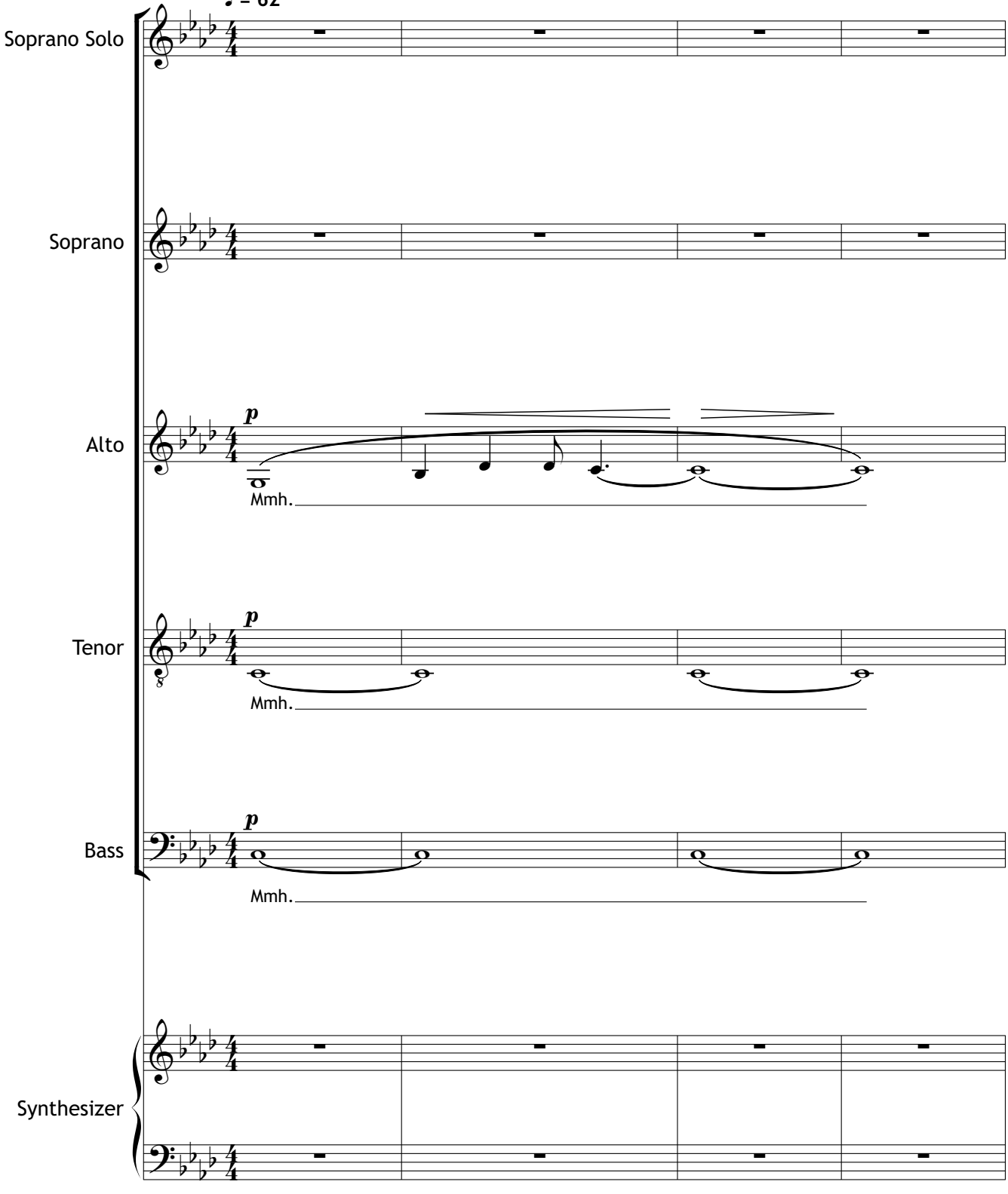
Quixotosis: Item 5 of "Tome of Stars"

Stargazer

Vocal Ensemble

Adagio — Lento e sospeso, quasi improvvisando; misterioso, trascendente, senza peso

♩ = 62



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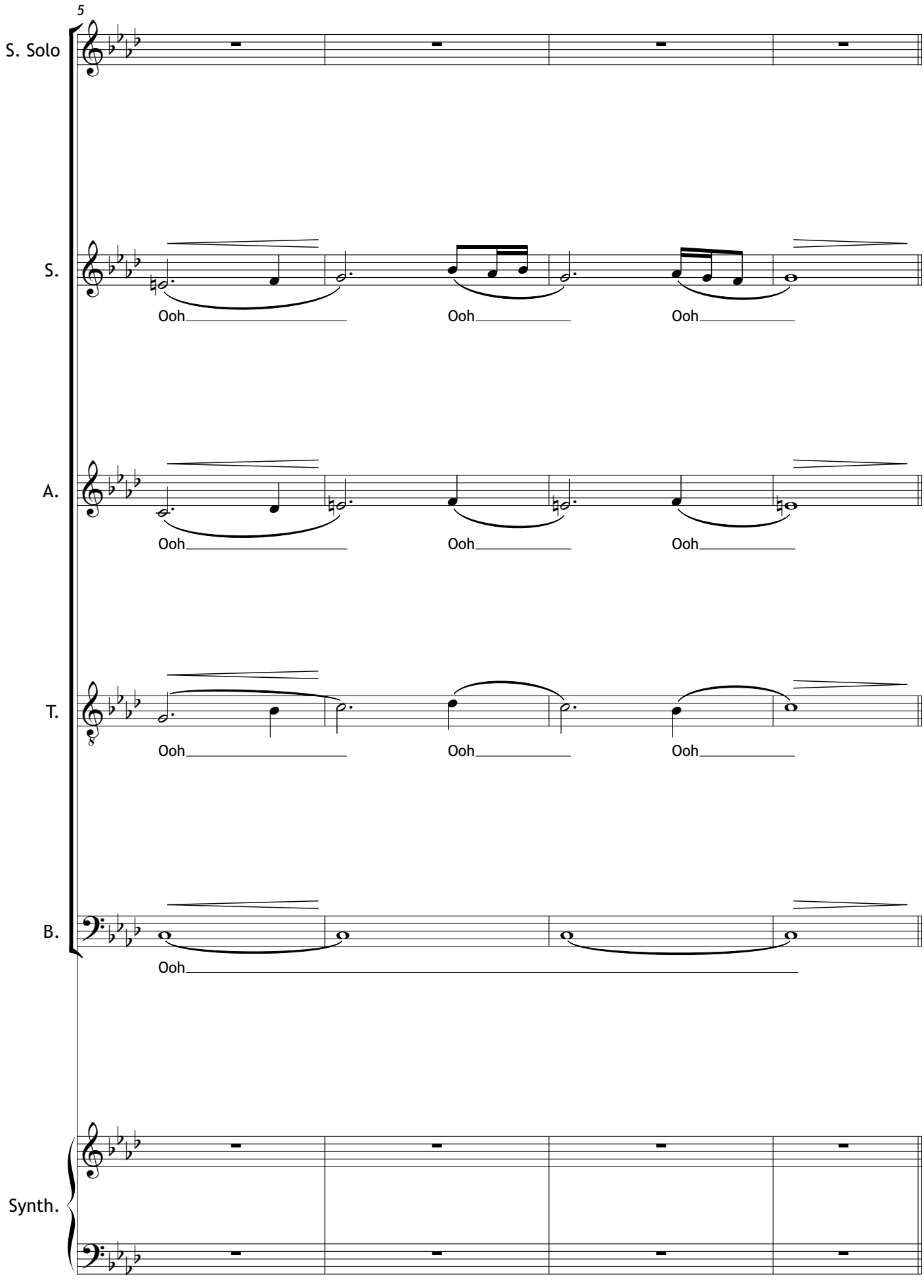

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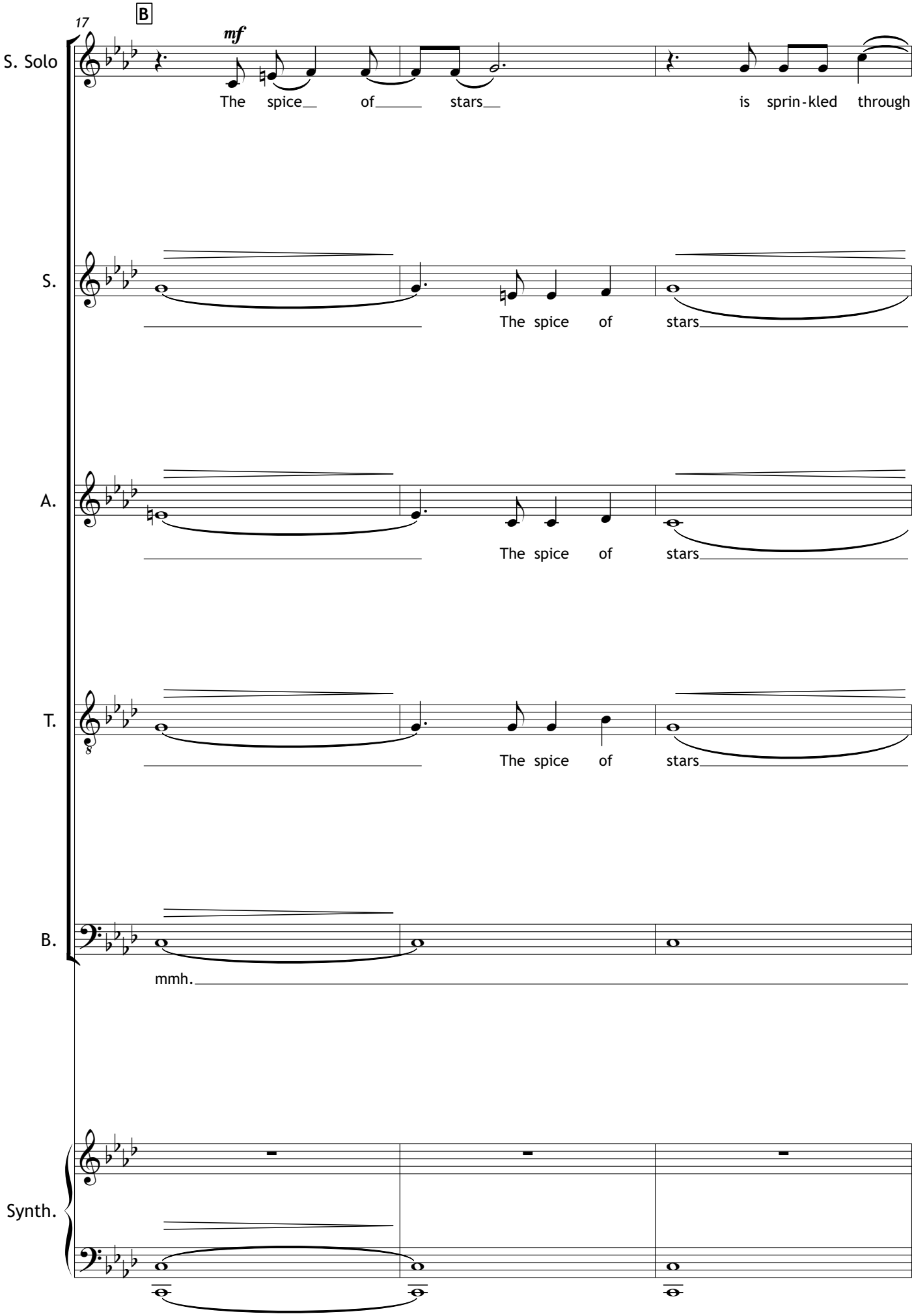

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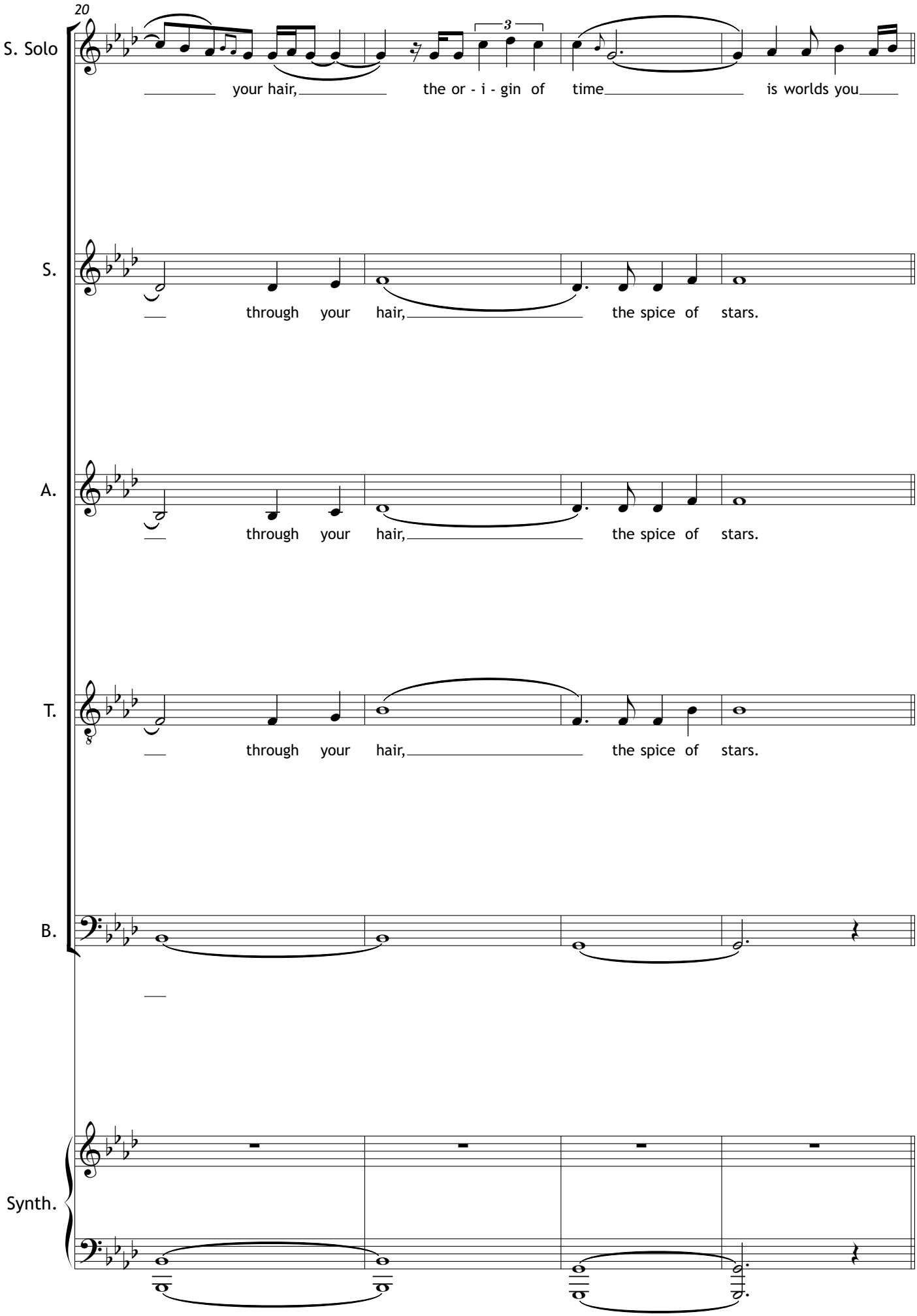

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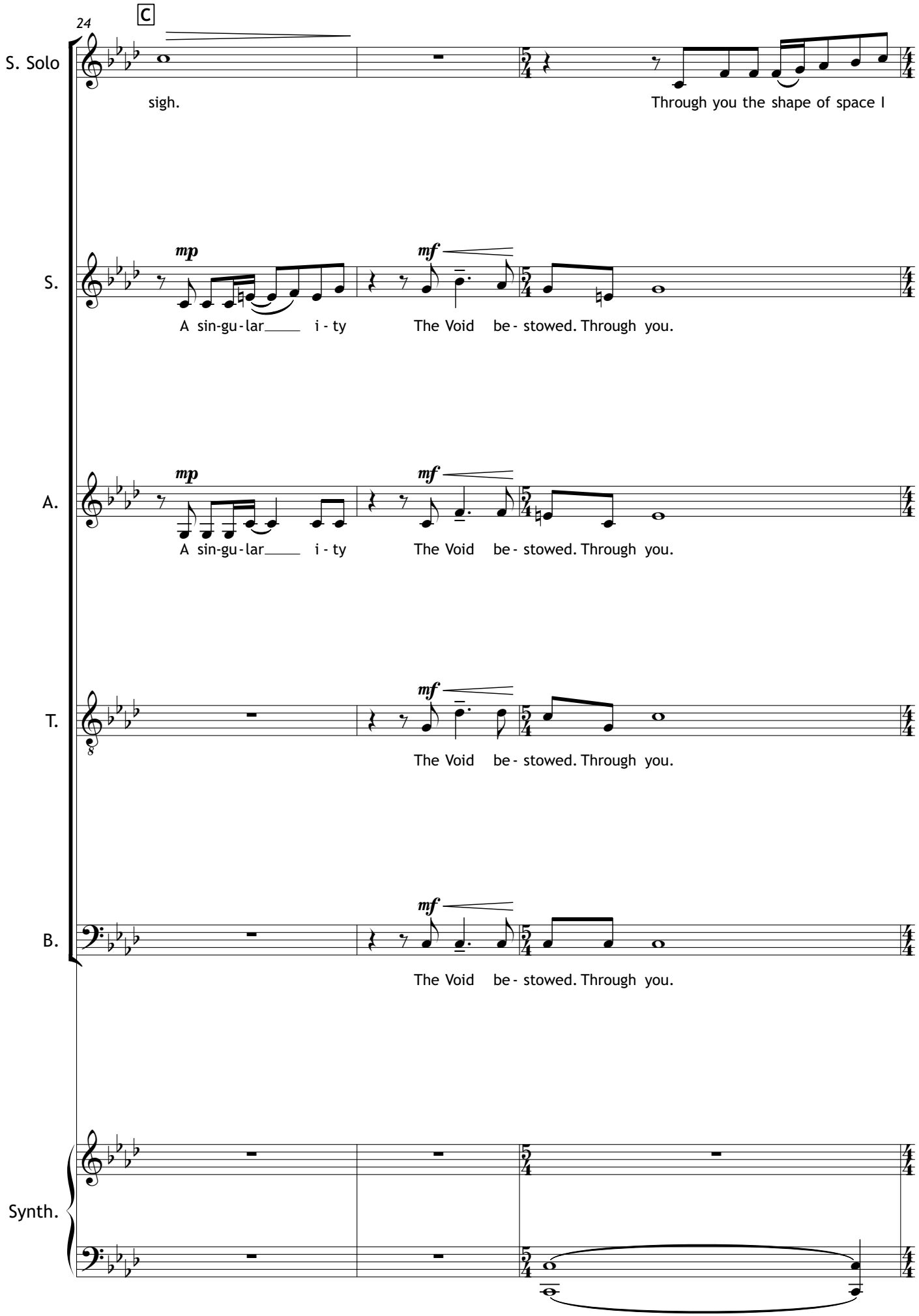

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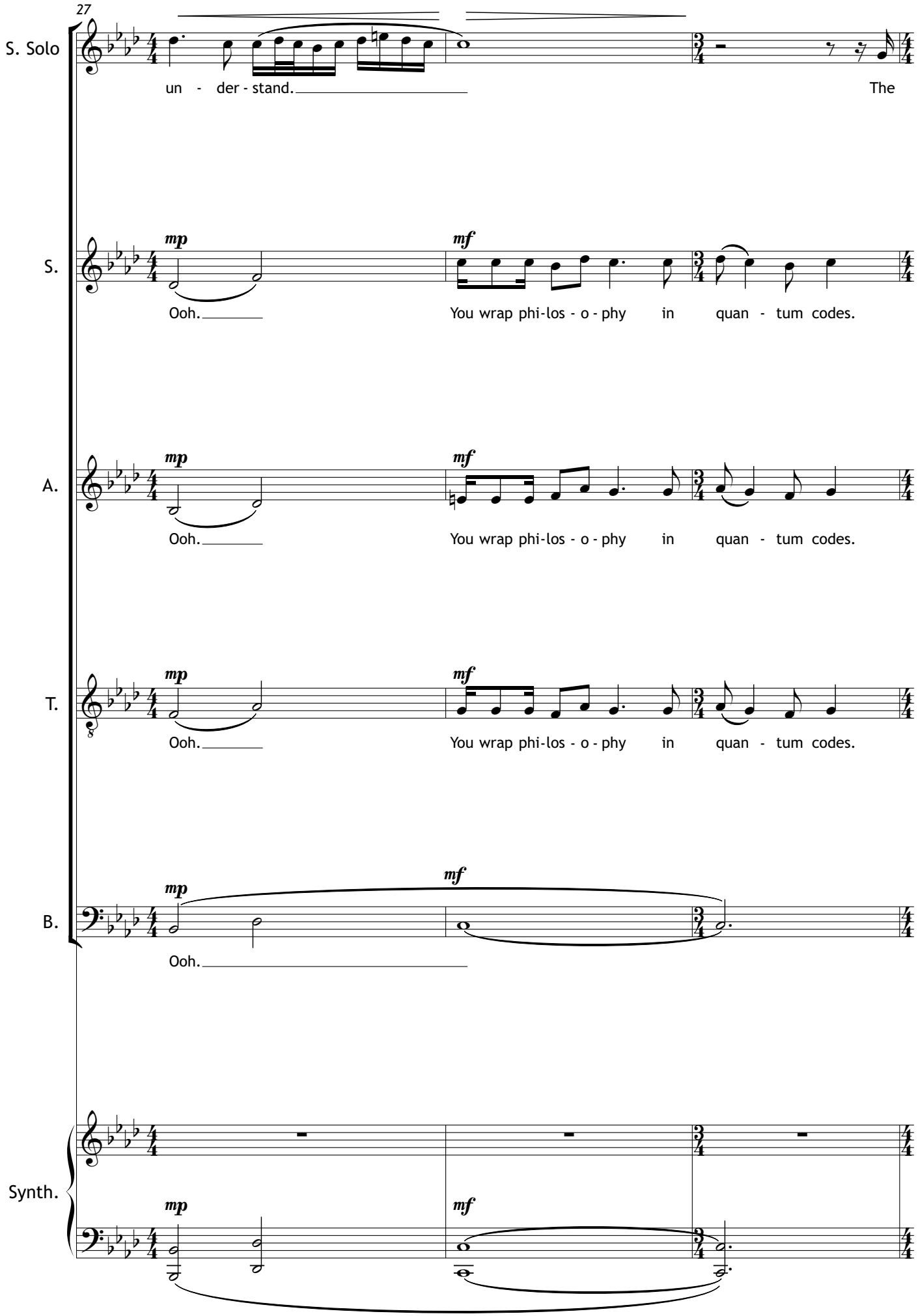

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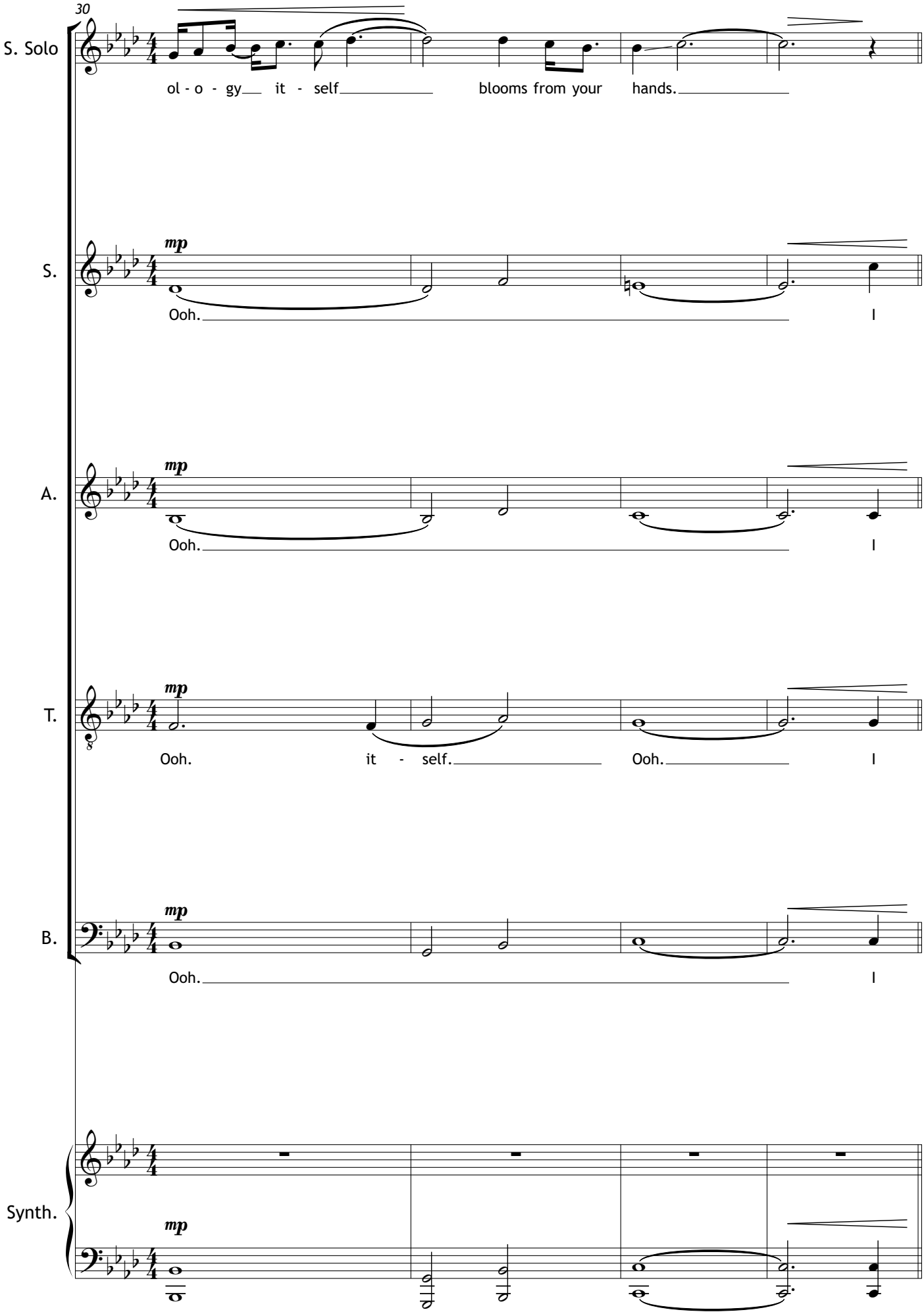

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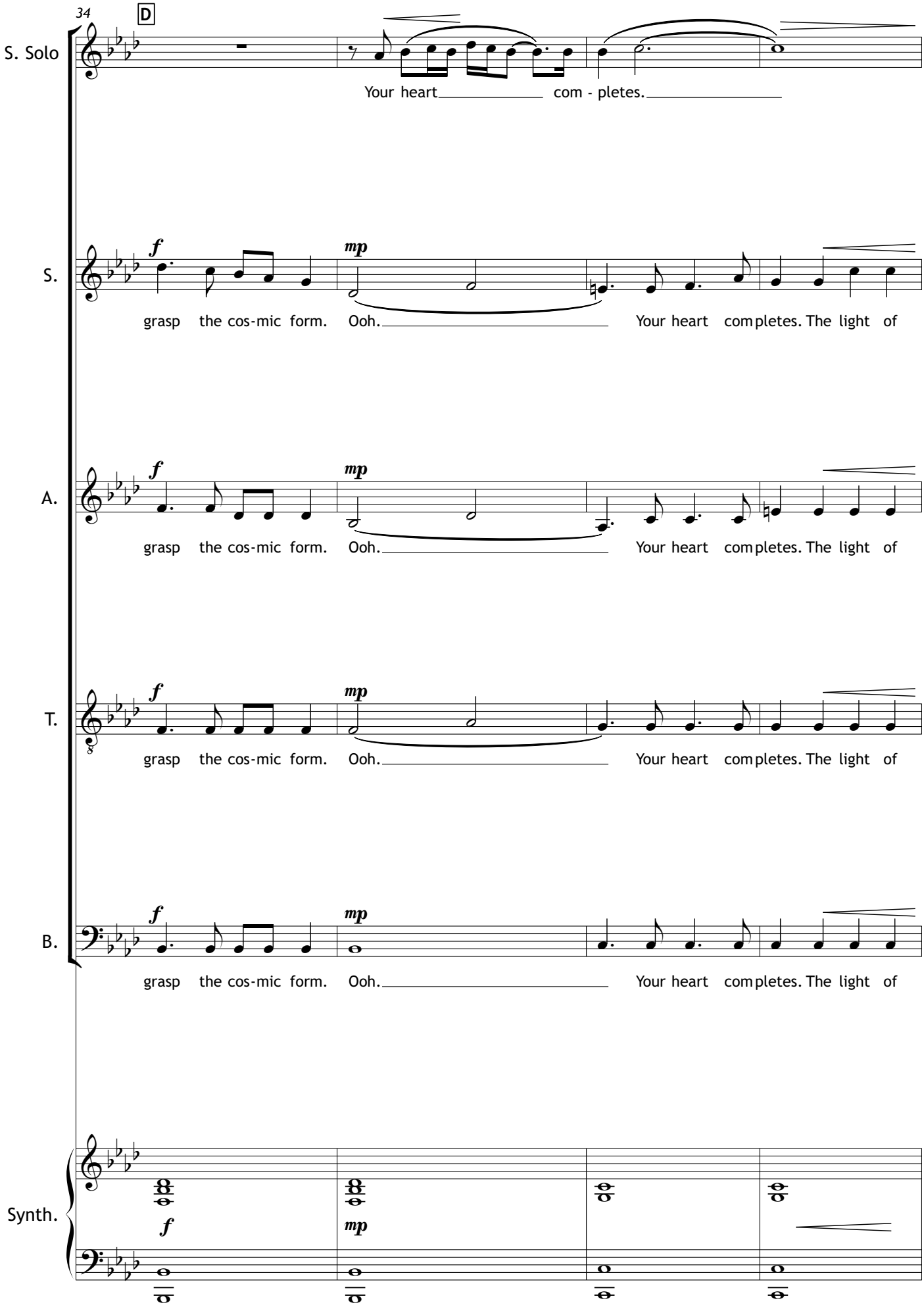

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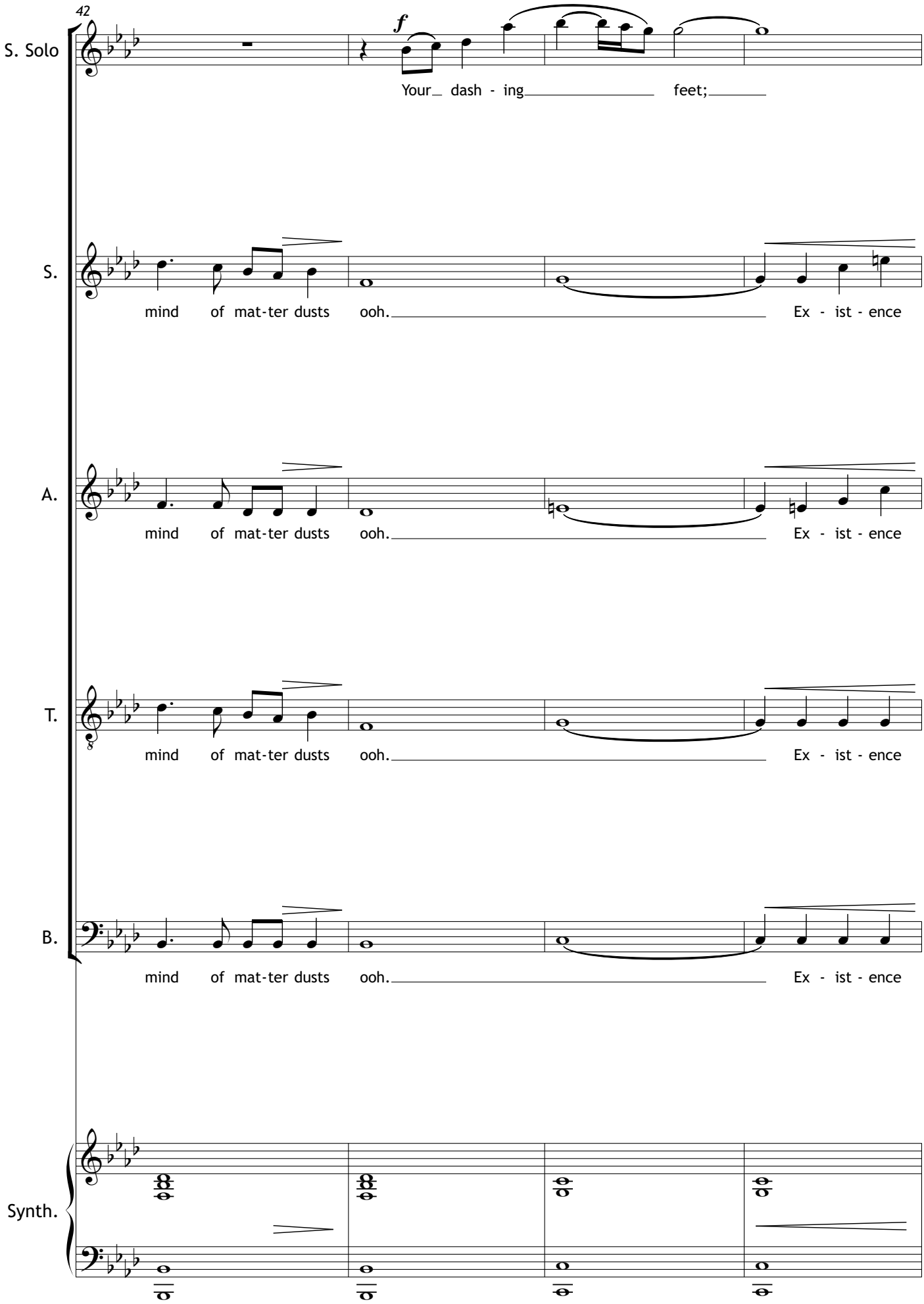

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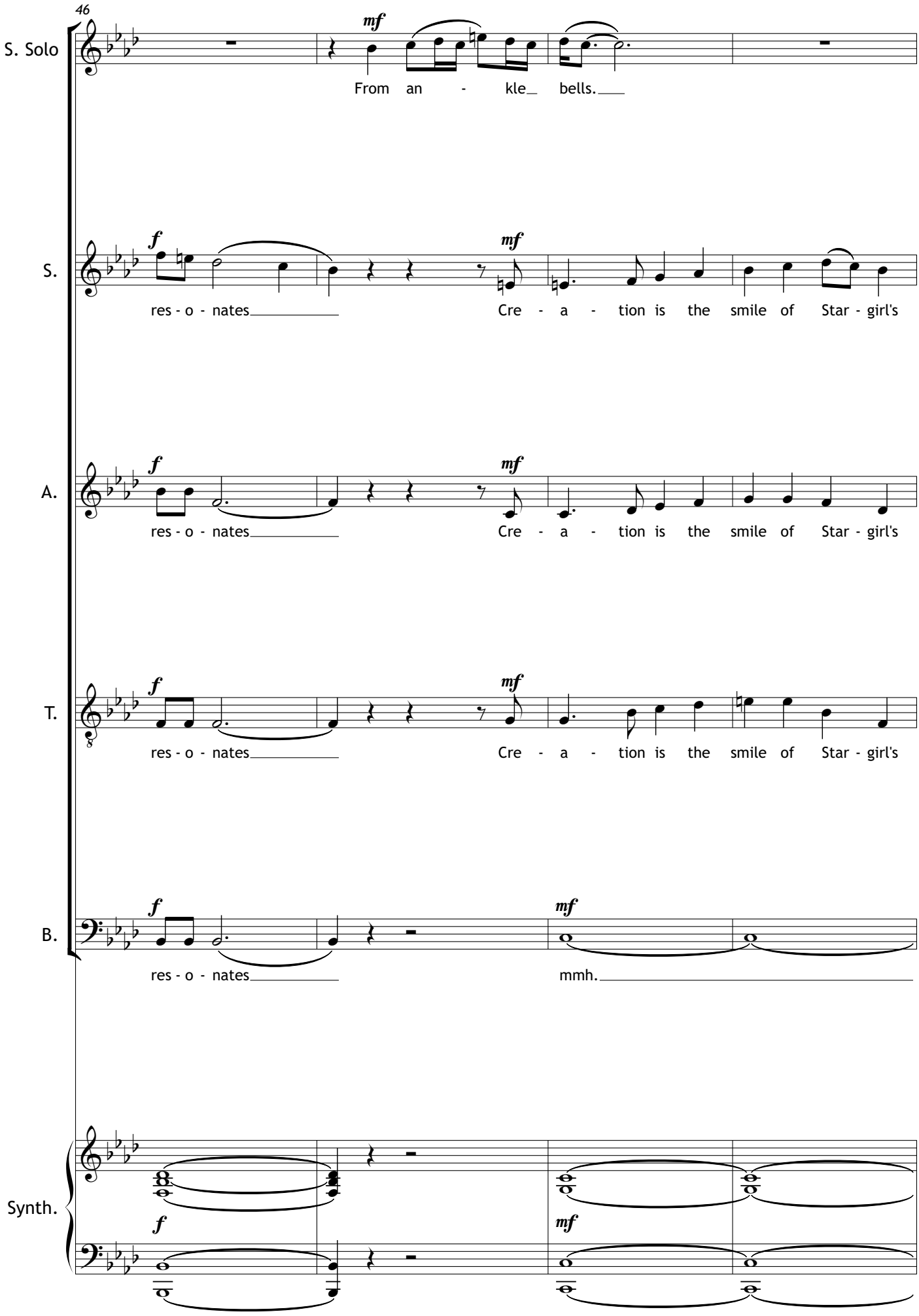

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O, It's Light Wherein I Dwell

This is the "in-verse" to *Dowland's In Darkness Let Me Dwell* (which is another song in this choral collection coming later). The poet sought to create a "mirror image" of the lutenist's darkness with opposite imagery and sentiment, echoing the song structure and phrasing of the original. All inversions are performed around the axis of the Stargirl, and thus she is seen to be (for the poet) the path to the opposite pole from despair, suffering, and grief — that of hope, healing, and happiness.

Here, "darkness" becomes "Light," "poisoned wine" "healing wine," "woes" a "womb," "pale ghosts and frightful shades" "graced diamond galaxies," and "hapless joy" an "astral" one. Whereas Dowland's piece is haunted by an impersonal, vague fog of grief and doom, the inverse poem is highly specific, ever illuminated, blessed, and decorated by the dancing grace of the beloved ("dance's trace," "thine orbits pranced," "belled they feet shall play"), with whom the poet "ever shines."

The claustrophobic prison of the "roof despair," the "ground sorrow," and the "walls weeping" is countered with an open ceiling to the heavens and the constellations that "shield from sorrow's schemes", a sun-gleaming ground, and resplendent, light-soaked walls illuminating his vision. Music is not "hellish" but the prayers of the poet turned to psalms and sung by the Stargirl's angels. The nightmarish image of frightful shades being the sole company of the writer is transformed to an equally unseen but sublime dance of "graced diamond galaxies" that "revolve" around him.

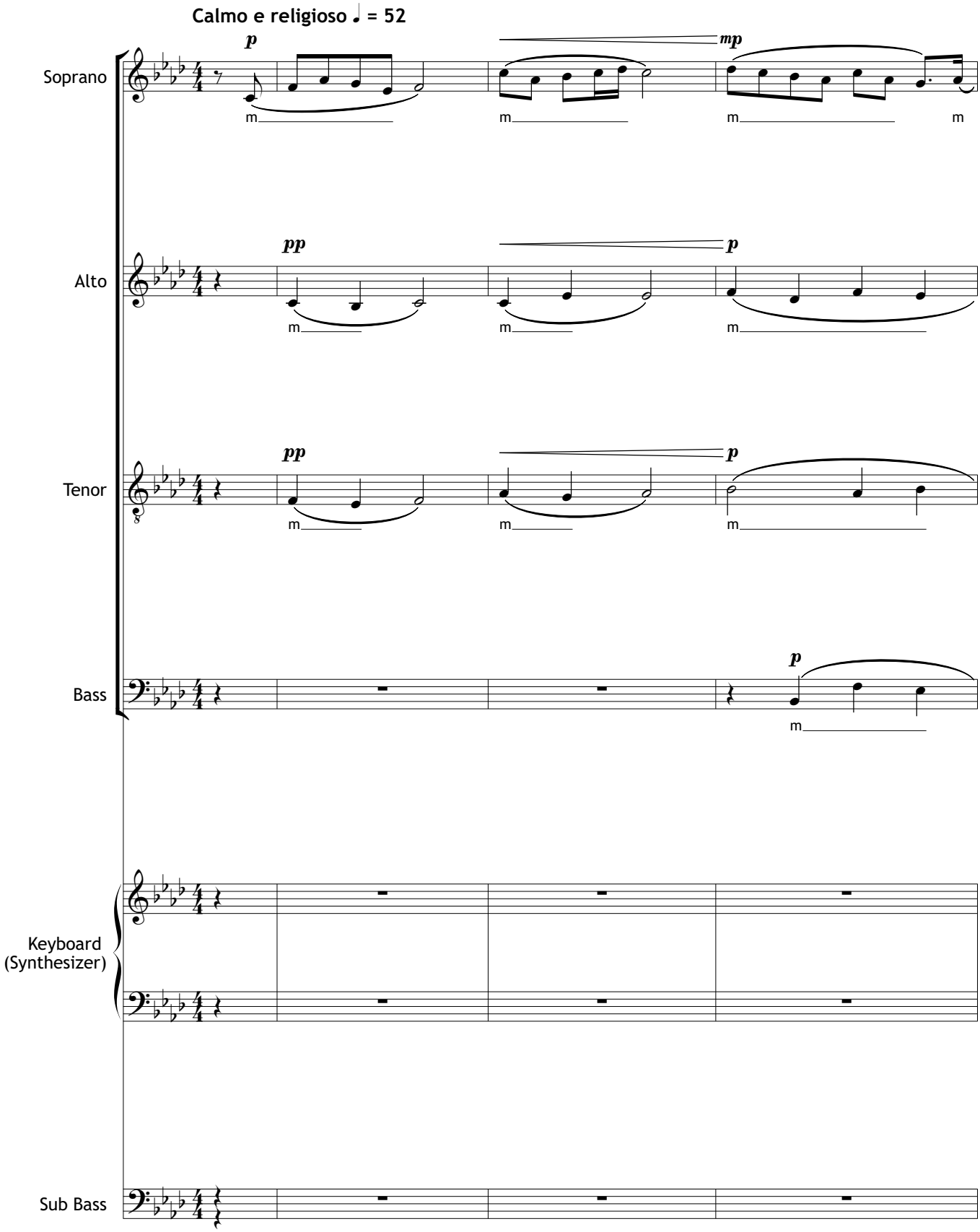
These contrasts are felt daily by the poet. From one breath to another, he feels her loss, another day passed, a life increasingly denied, her light hidden. In another breath, "graced diamond galaxies, unseen, revolve with me," and he recalls and is bathed in a "starred shelter spark'ling hope that shields from sorrow's schemes." Certainly in his life separated from the Stargirl, the darkness is a more constant companion. But there can be light, even if, with every year, it dims.

It's Light Wherein I Dwell

In Darkness and in Light, a "Tome of Stars" Companion

Stargazer

Choir SATB and Keyboard (Synth)



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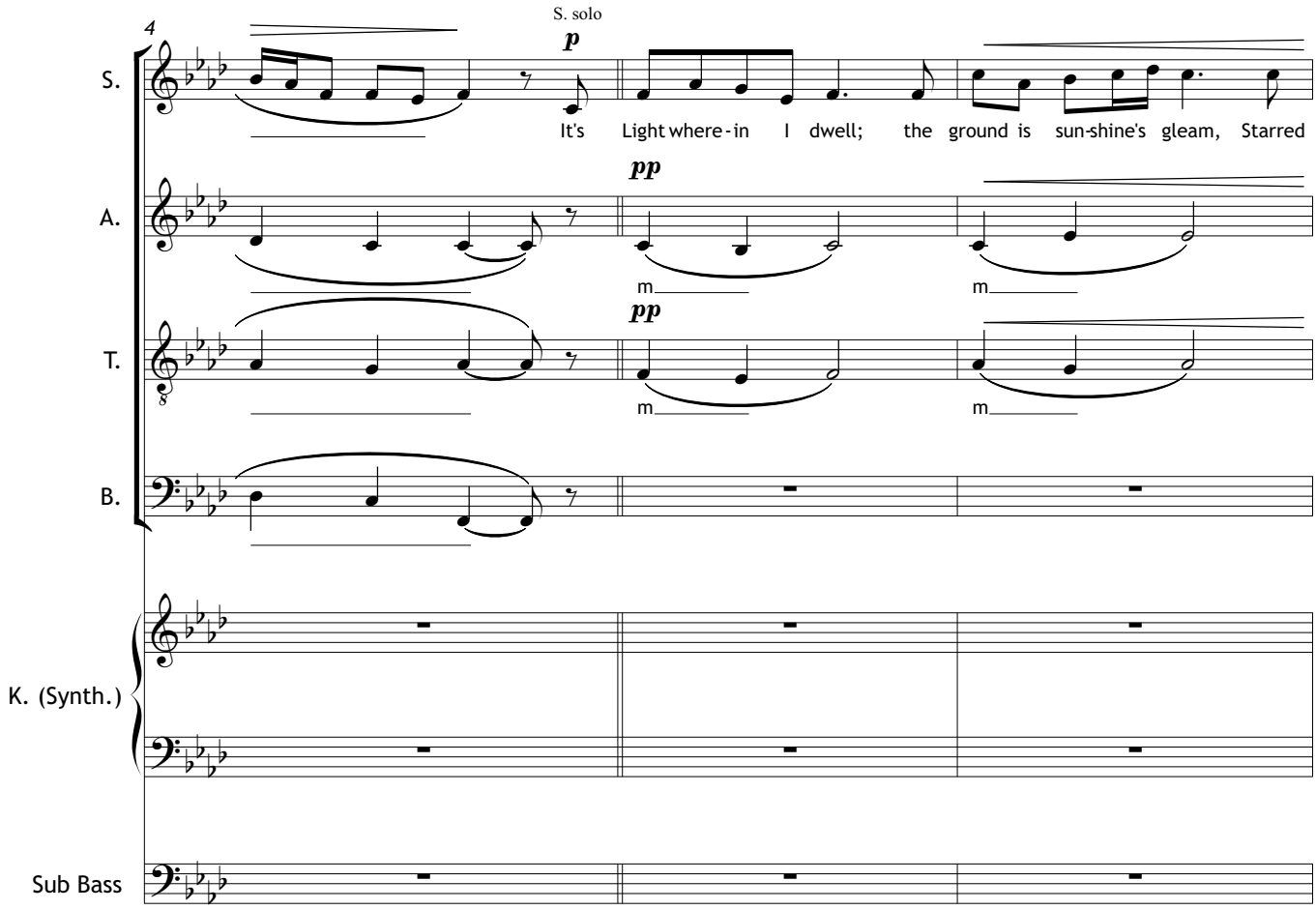

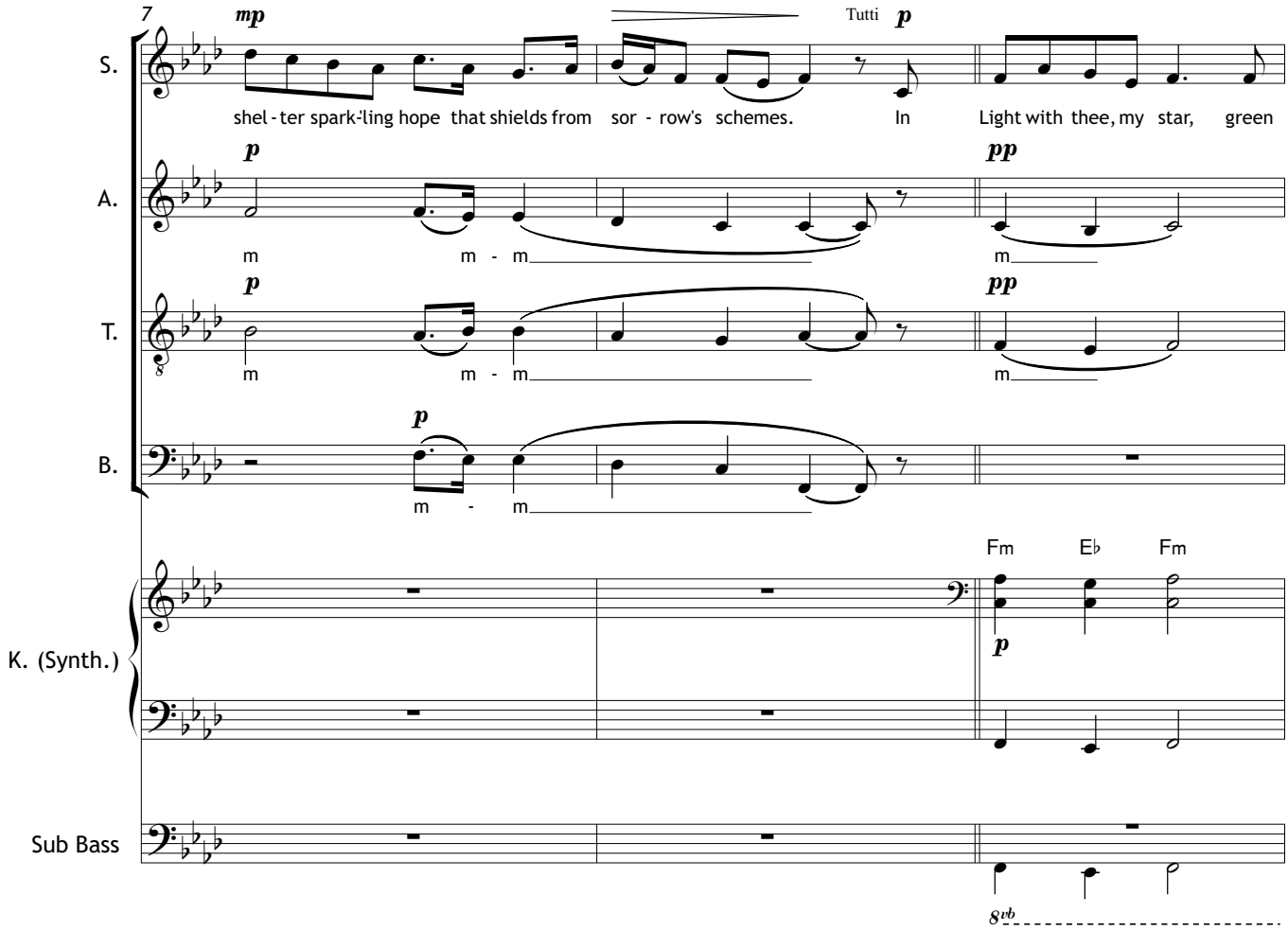

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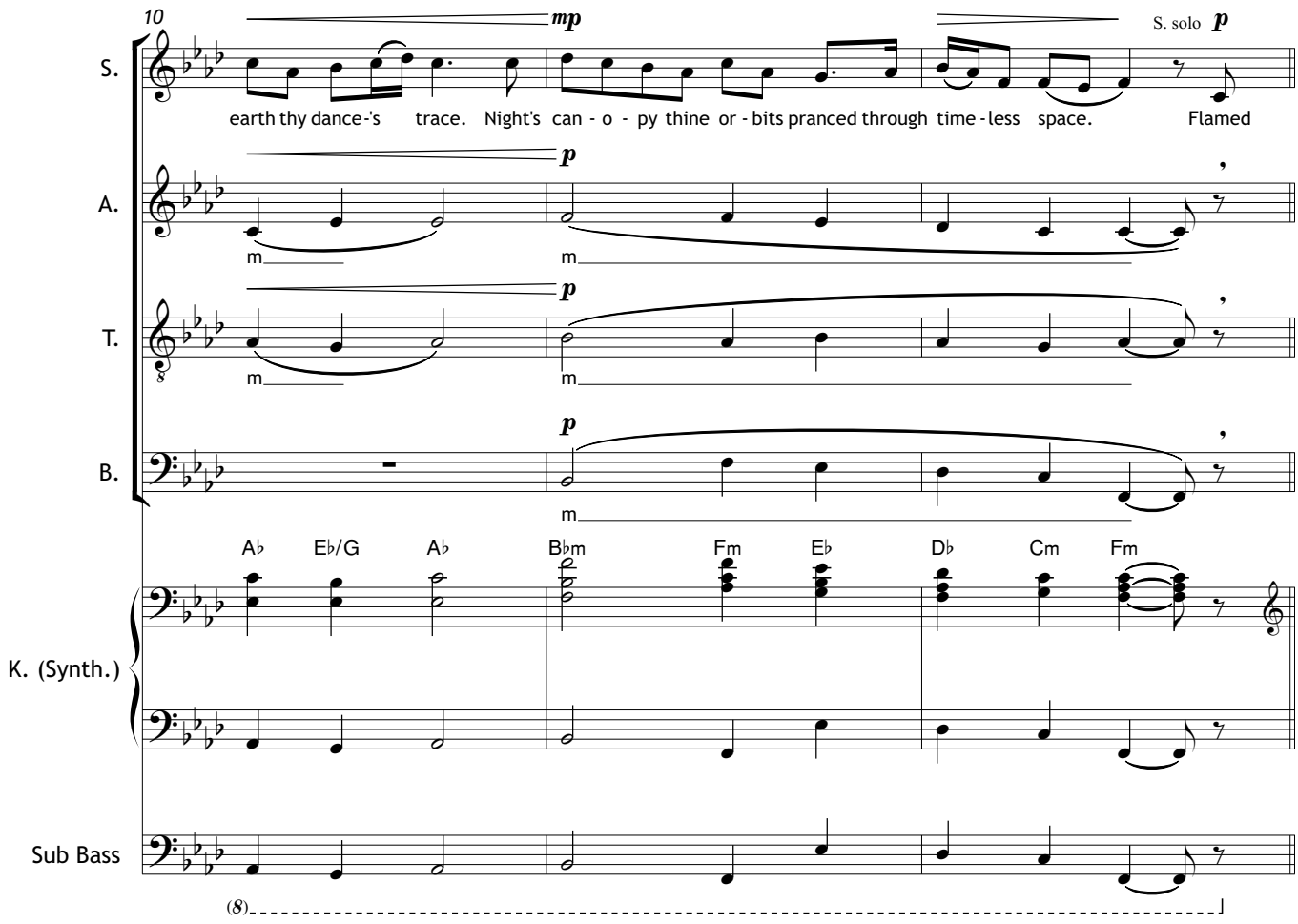

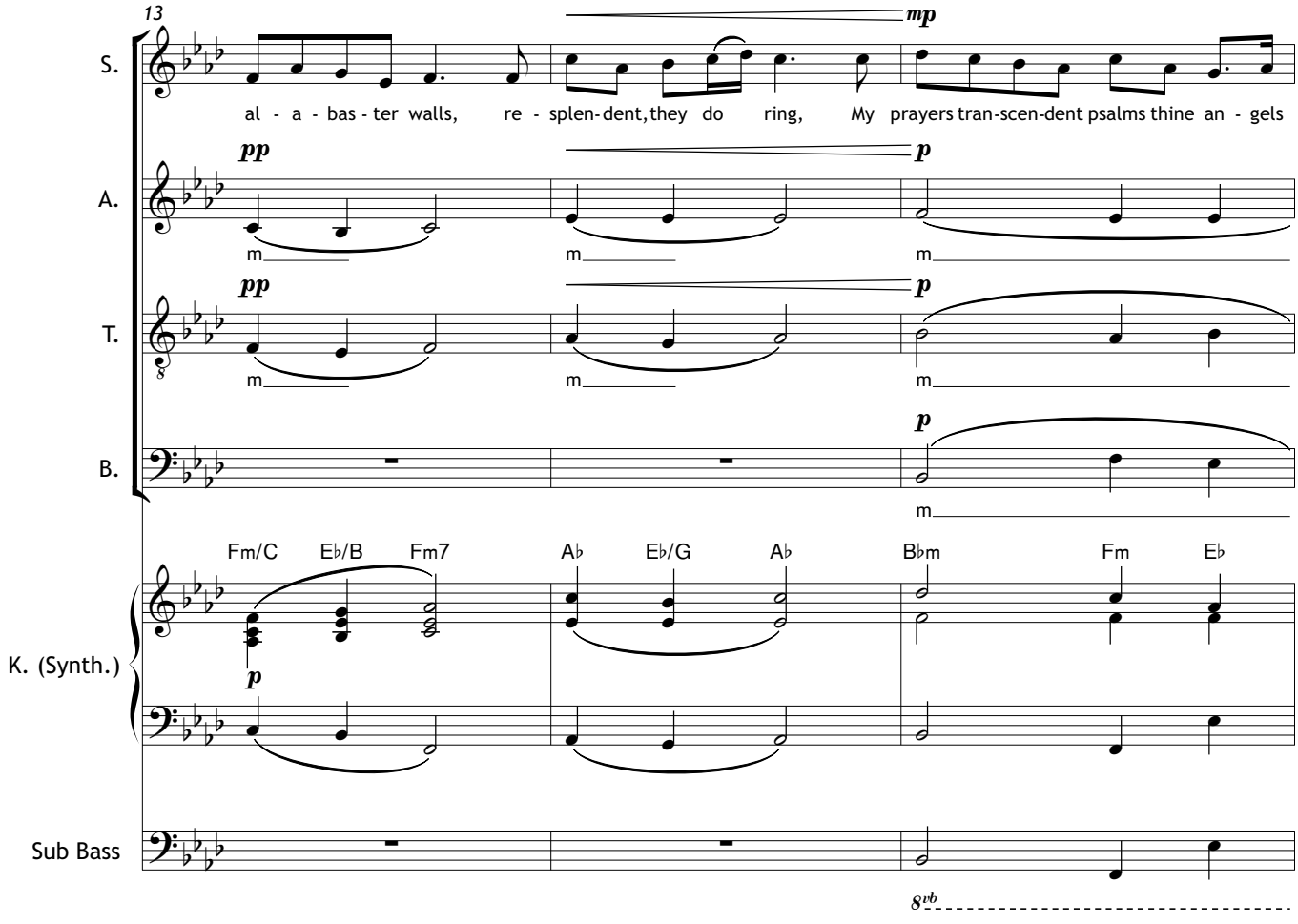

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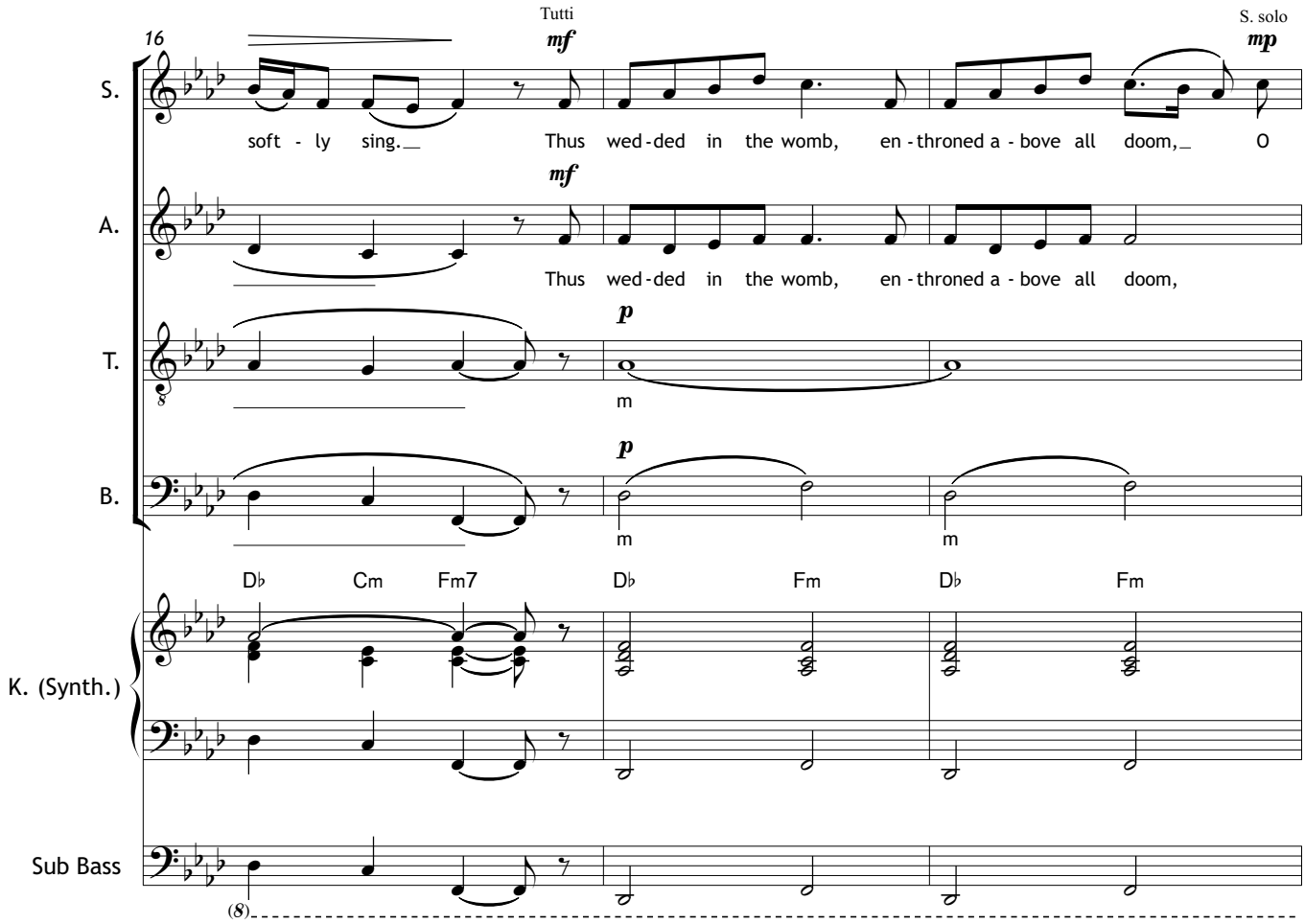

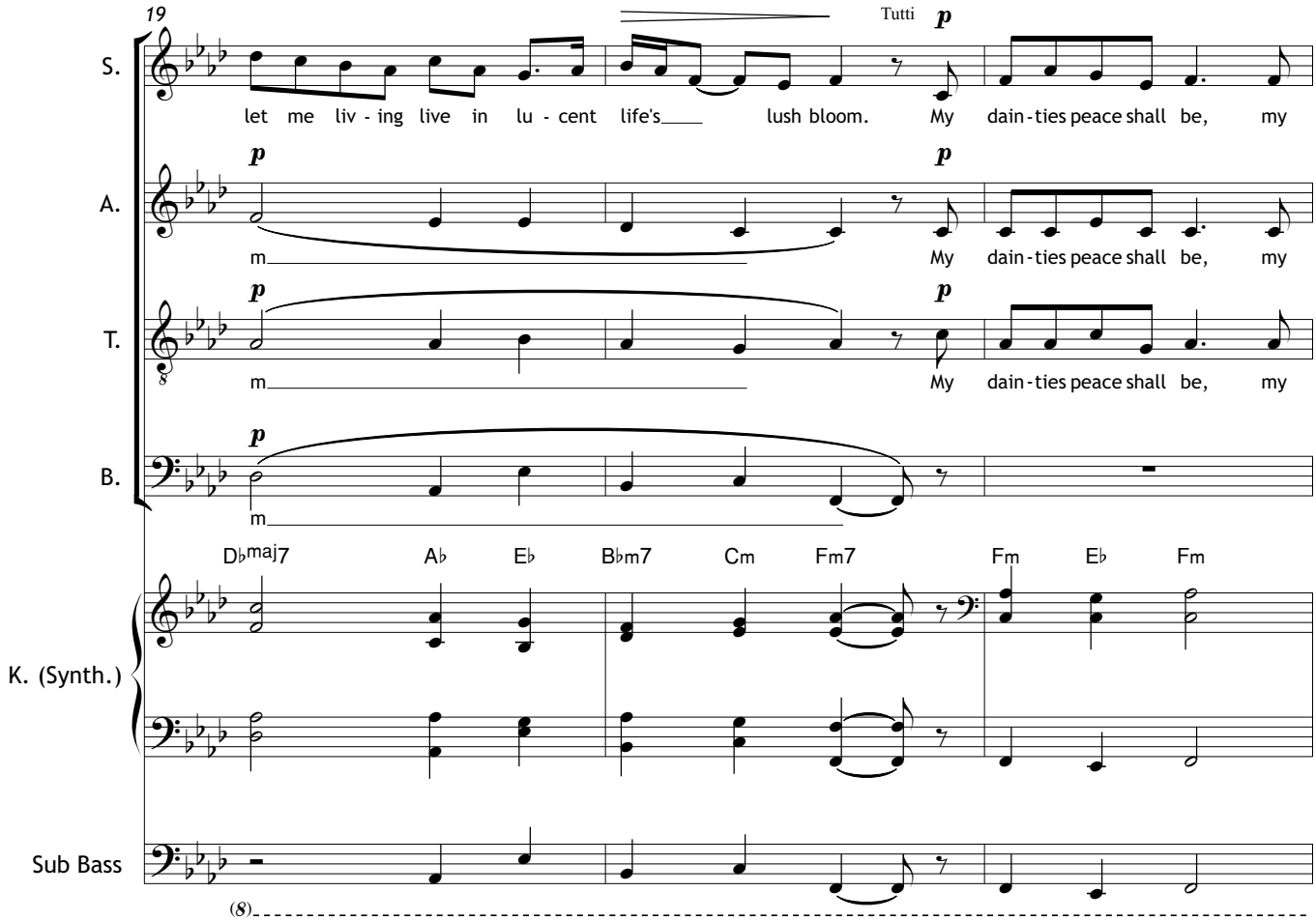

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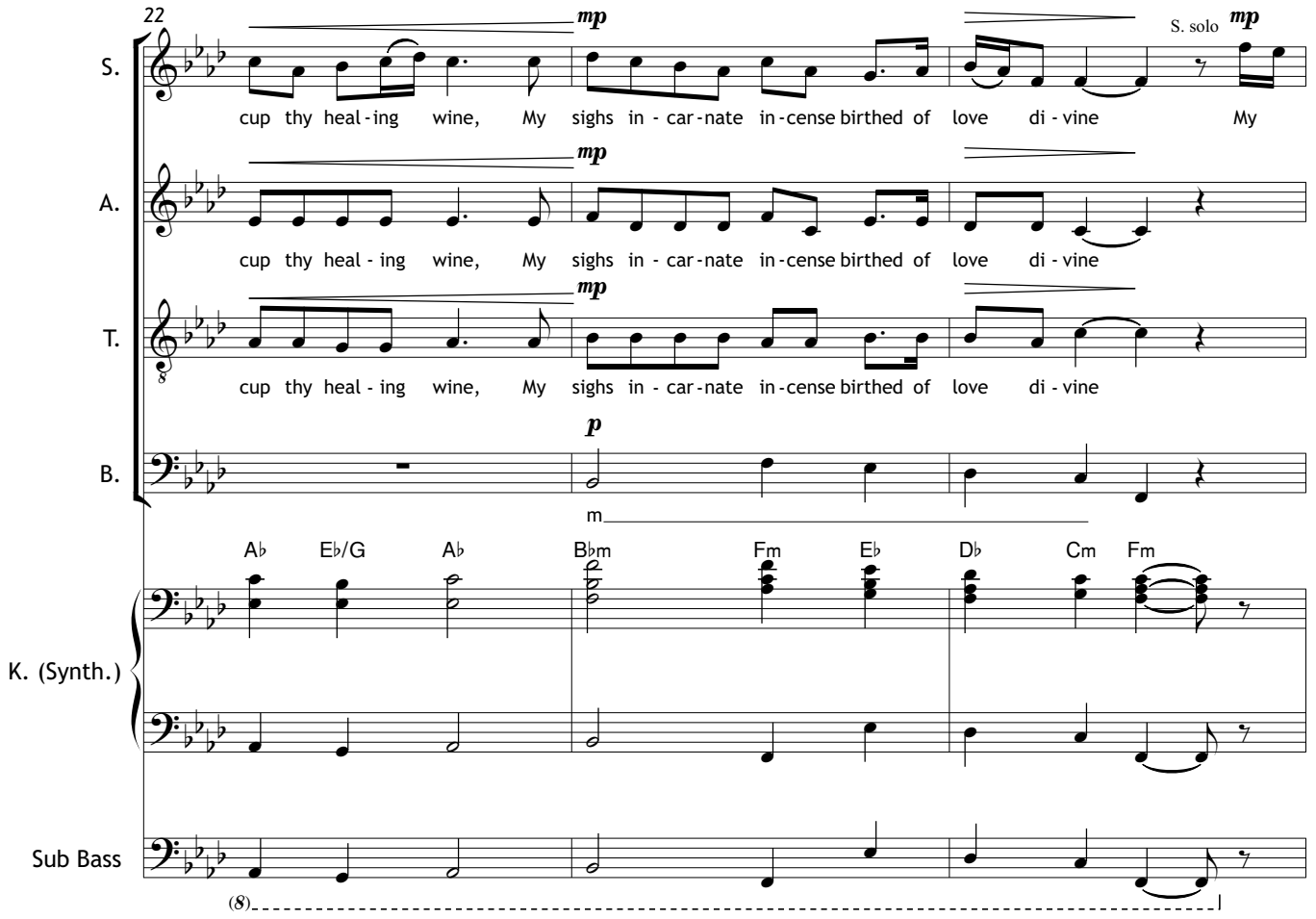

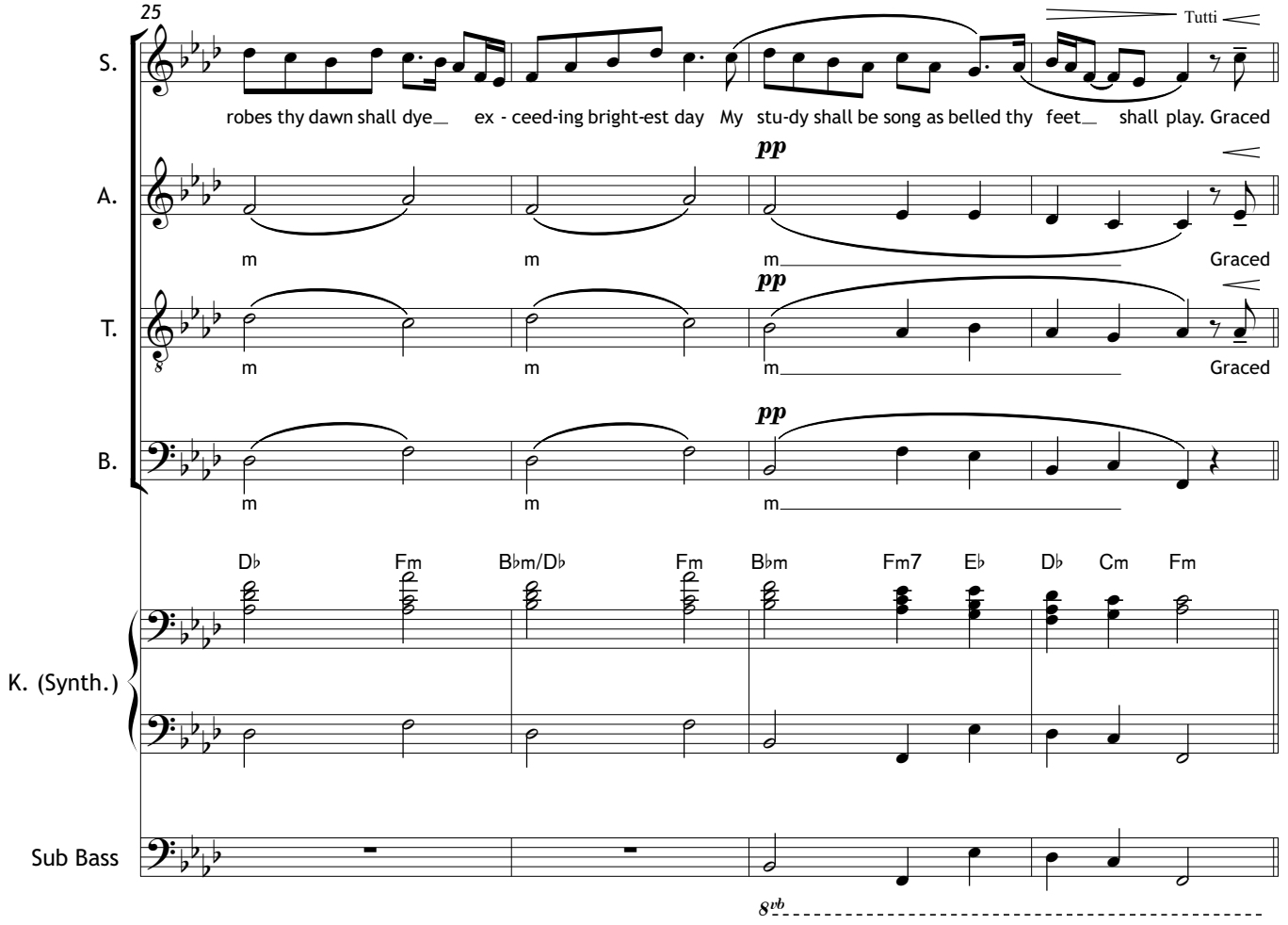

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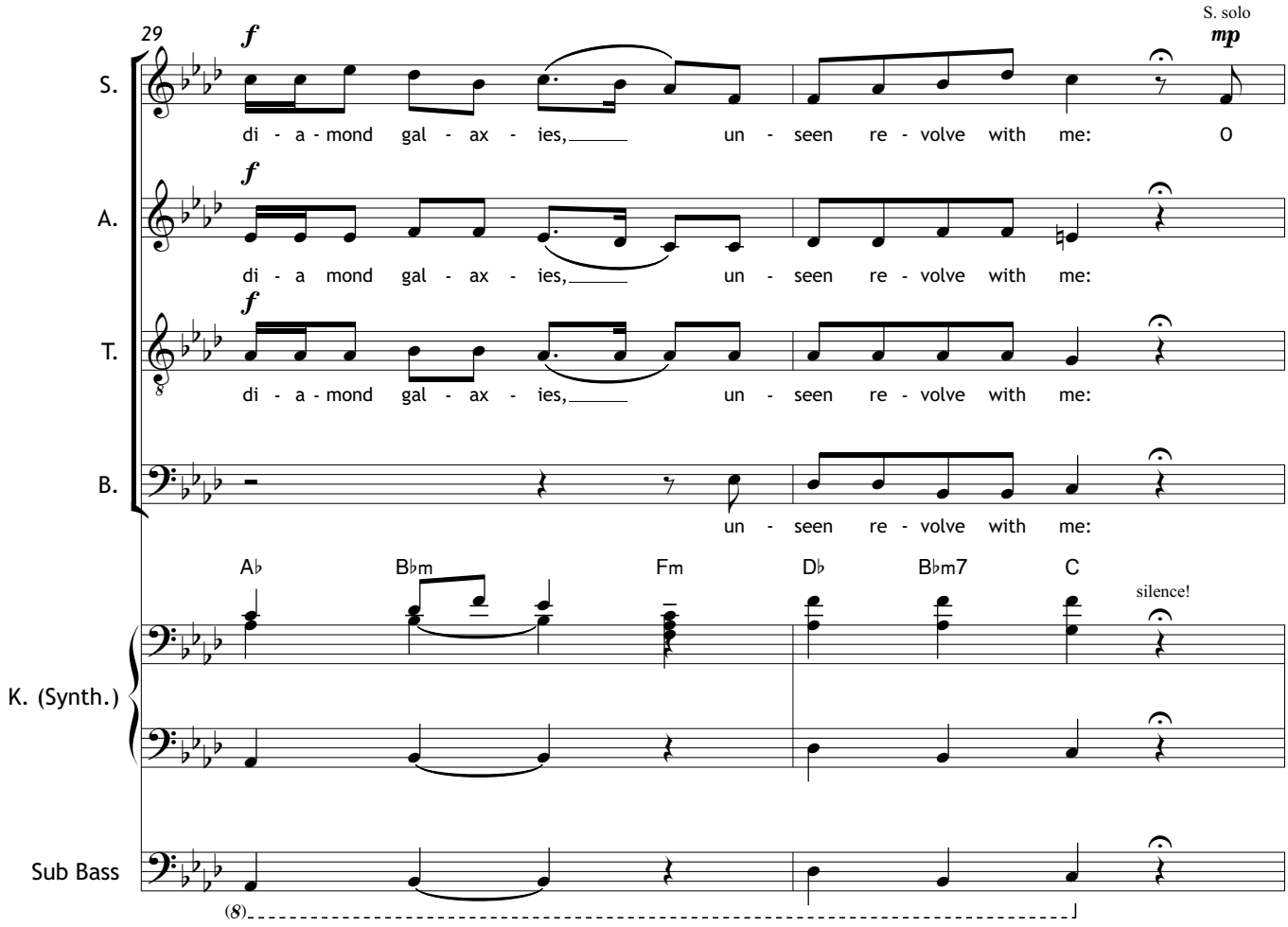

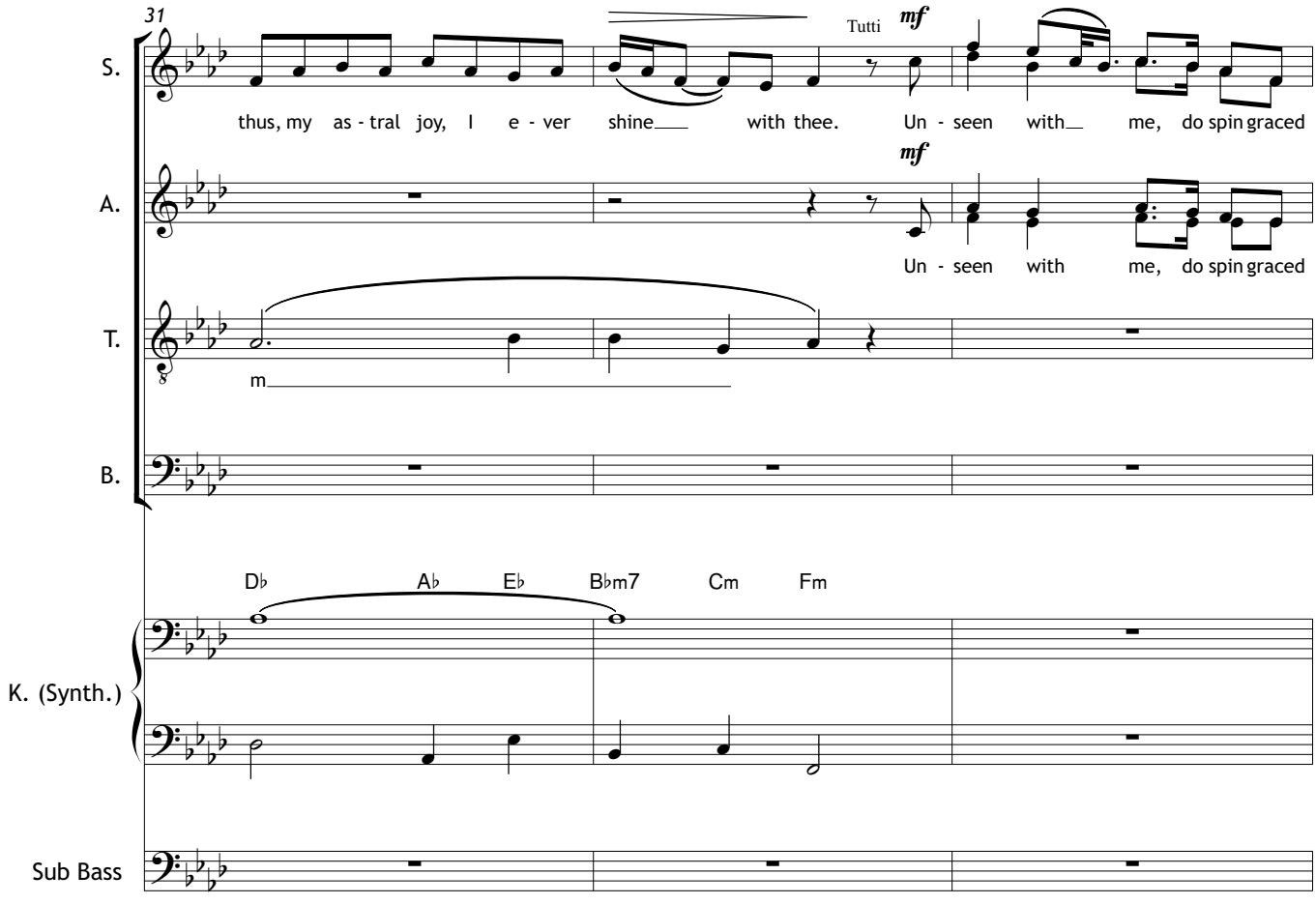

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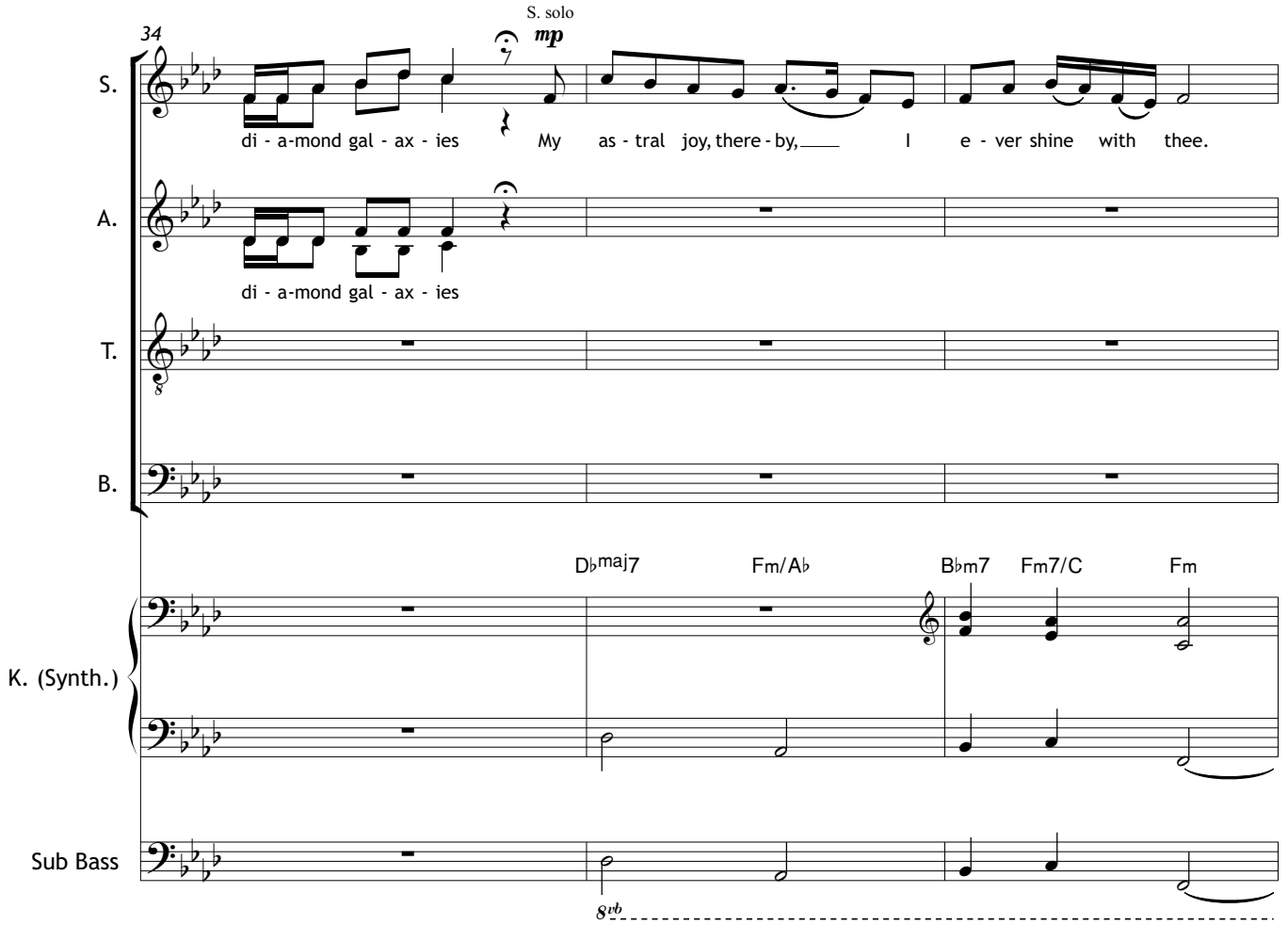
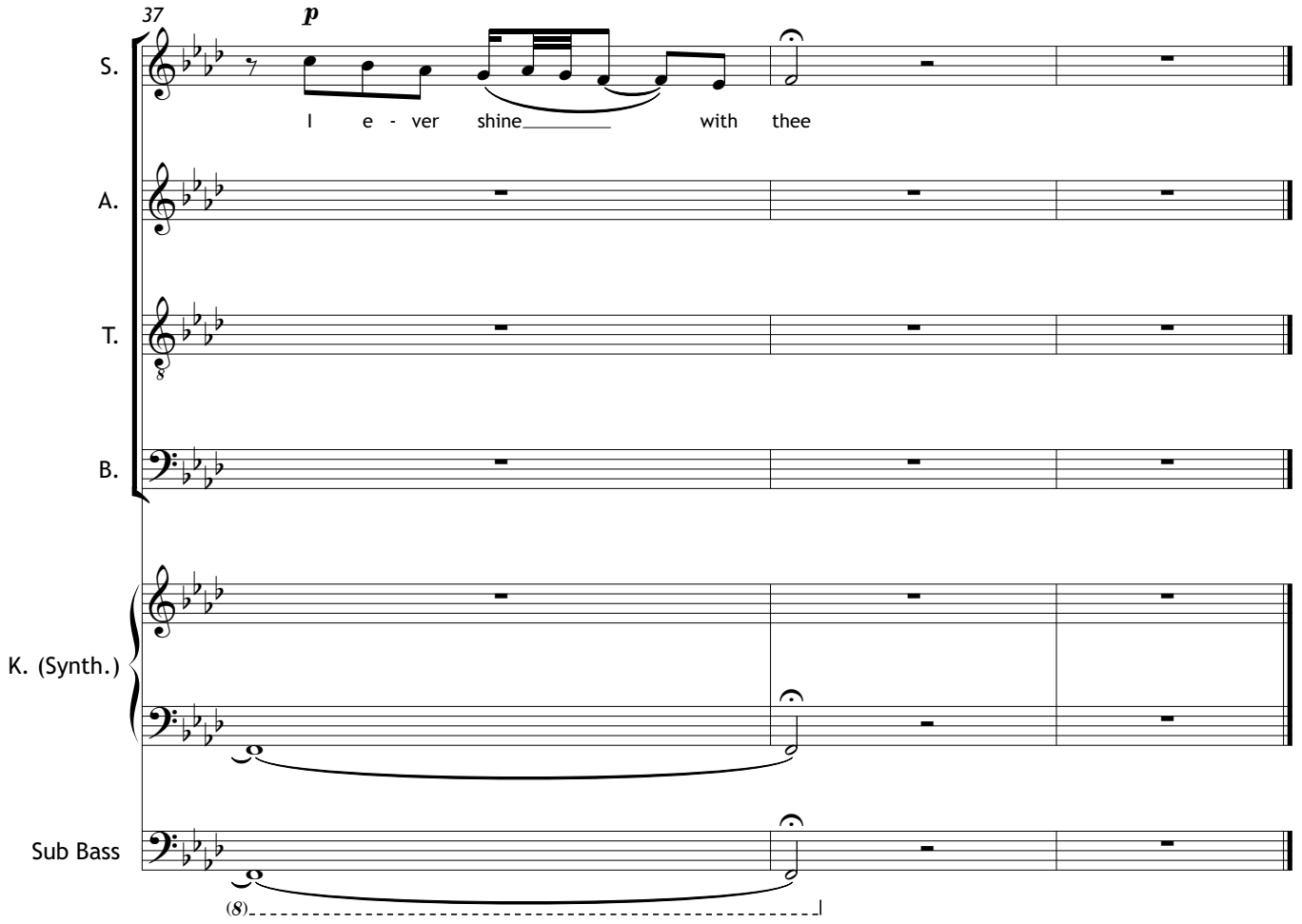




CC0 2026 - Stargazer

Senescence

Senescence is another botanical term, one meaning the decay of the flowering stage. The poems of *Senescence* unfold toward heartbreak. Forces too easy to understand drive the lovers apart despite their depth of feeling. All the intrusions that myth-making cannot transfigure make their appearance: trauma carried forward from unspoken pasts (e.g., *Once upon a Time* poems), ingrained patterns of avoidance and reaction, external obligations and pressures, wounds of culture and gender and expectation. Here, the poet and his beloved fail each other, even as they try to hold on.

Anthesis told of blooming. *Senescence* laments an unraveling. Bitterness, confusion, and the recriminations lovers hurl make their appearance, complemented with the silences inhabited when words turn against them. A poet once intoxicated by light, now falls from those elevated heights to break profoundly. Some songs grapple with memory. Others with guilt. Some ache with need and some lash with anger. Through them all runs an undiminished and unresolved current of longing for the beloved.

The title *Senescence* evokes aging and decay. The botanical term is rendered beyond natural context to the existential with emotional, spiritual, and mythic connotations. What the lovers perceived as a transcendent, celestial relationship fails in the reality of flawed embodiment. What once seemed timeless is imprisoned and decays within time.

Thus *Senescence* is a climactic shattering of their bond, but it is not the end of the story. In the wreckage of their shared life are glowing shards, eternal elements of love and beauty now wrapped within the burden of profound loss. Those sharp gems are embedded in his soul, plunged deeply into his awareness, and so while much is broken, the poet continues his chant with a sacred grief that he carries throughout life: a personal *Scripture*.

F. Once upon a Time, Part 1

This sonnet is a flashback, the first of the "Once Upon a Time" quartet of related pieces, where the poet's childhood is recast as a (dark) fairy tale. It serves the purpose of giving the reader of *Tome of Stars* what the poet thinks is critical background, without which the poet's flawed choices are hard to understand. The beloved also could not understand him and eventually left him for the psychological chains that prevented him from leaving his old life to be with her. He could not explain it at the time. He did not understand it. Not until his fifth decade when long periods of self-reflection during the stillness of the COVID-19 pandemic afforded him insight into his past and its effect on him. In desperate optimism, he tried to share these insights with the Stargirl, but she was finished with anything to do with him, and he received only silence, and in one blighted instance, furious and hateful reprimand (see *Letter, December 8, 2020* from *Tome of Stars*).

Part 1 tells a traumatic story, one of childhood instability, abandonment, and abuse (specifically, maternal sexual and emotional abuse). The lyrics suggest that these long, formative years would warp his psychology into self-doubt, self-hatred, stunted emotional development, and future relationship sabotage through adaptations that proved toxic outside of the environment in which he lived as a child: *"When nurture's milk becomes a demon's kiss/Each poisoned cell is marked for the abyss."*

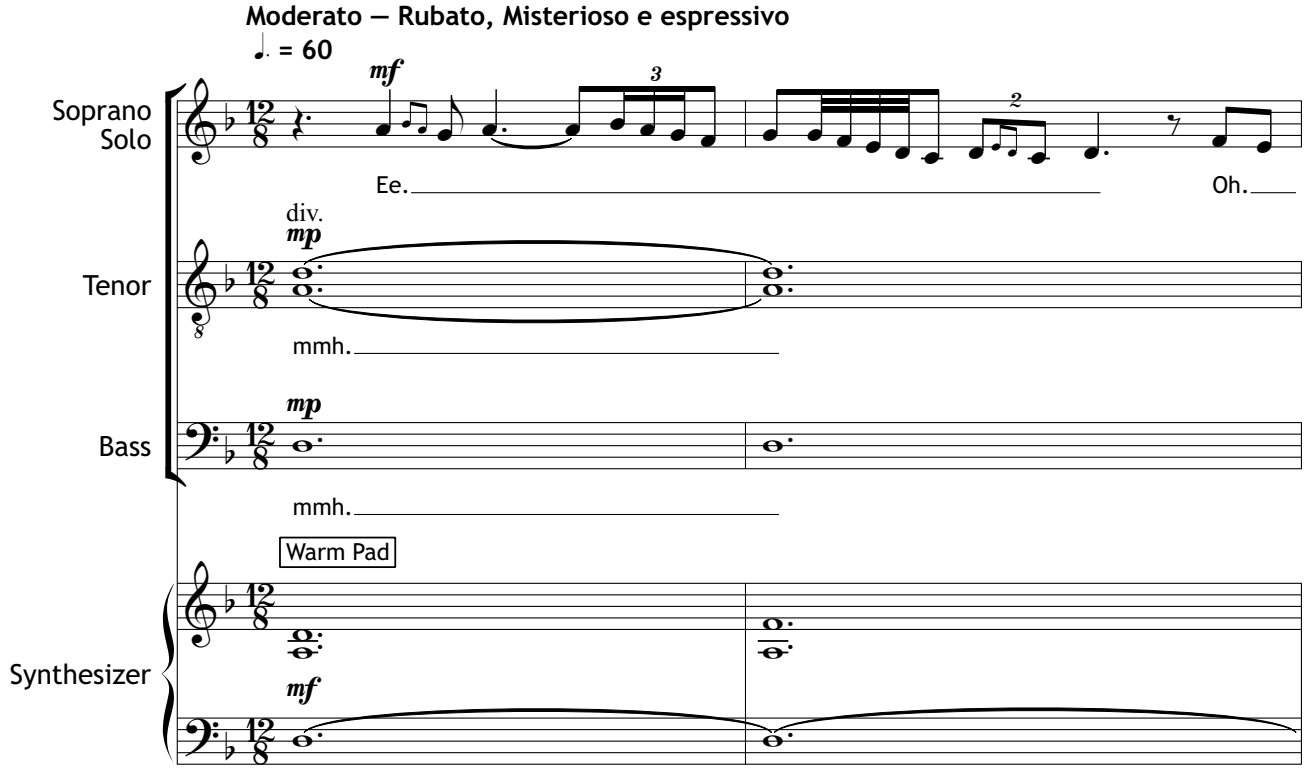
Thus the poet sees himself (examine viscerally in the poem *ur a lost person*). As *Part 3* makes clear, for *"one brief eon"* with the Stargirl, he felt he had been redeemed from his personal malignancies. But it was an illusion. Her departure, her words, proved to his mind that indeed, there was no escaping the rot within him. She rendered the final judgment and ultimate damnation.

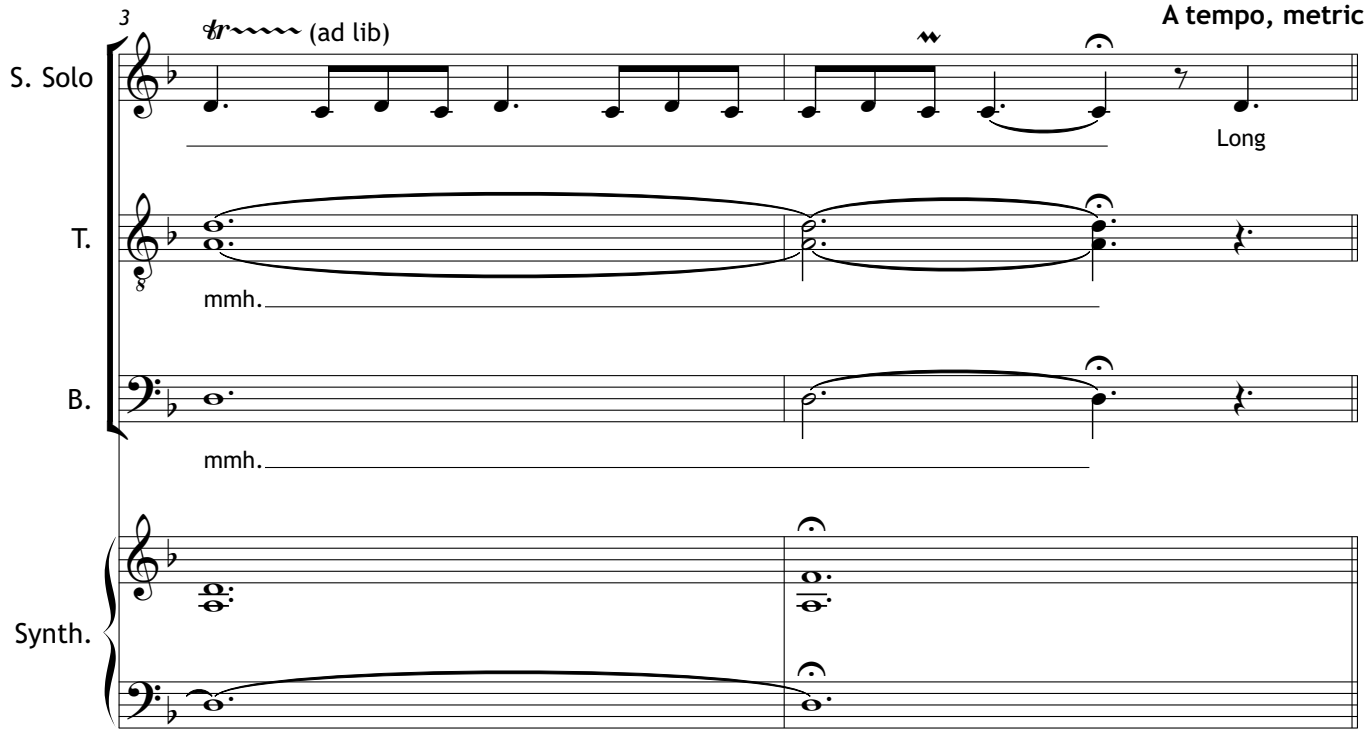
Once Upon A Time, Part 1

Senescence: Item 2 of "Tome of Stars"

Stargazer

Vocal Ensemble





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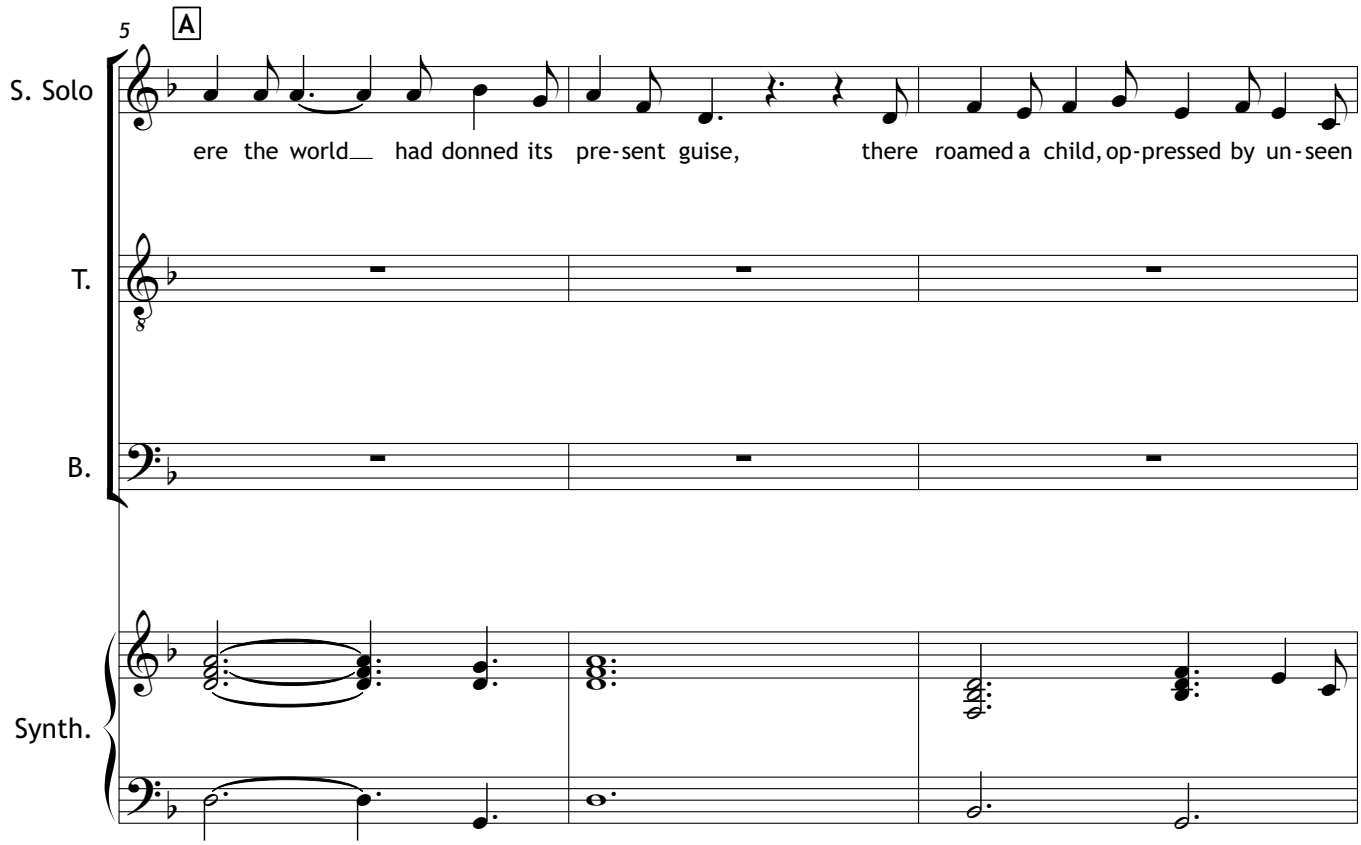

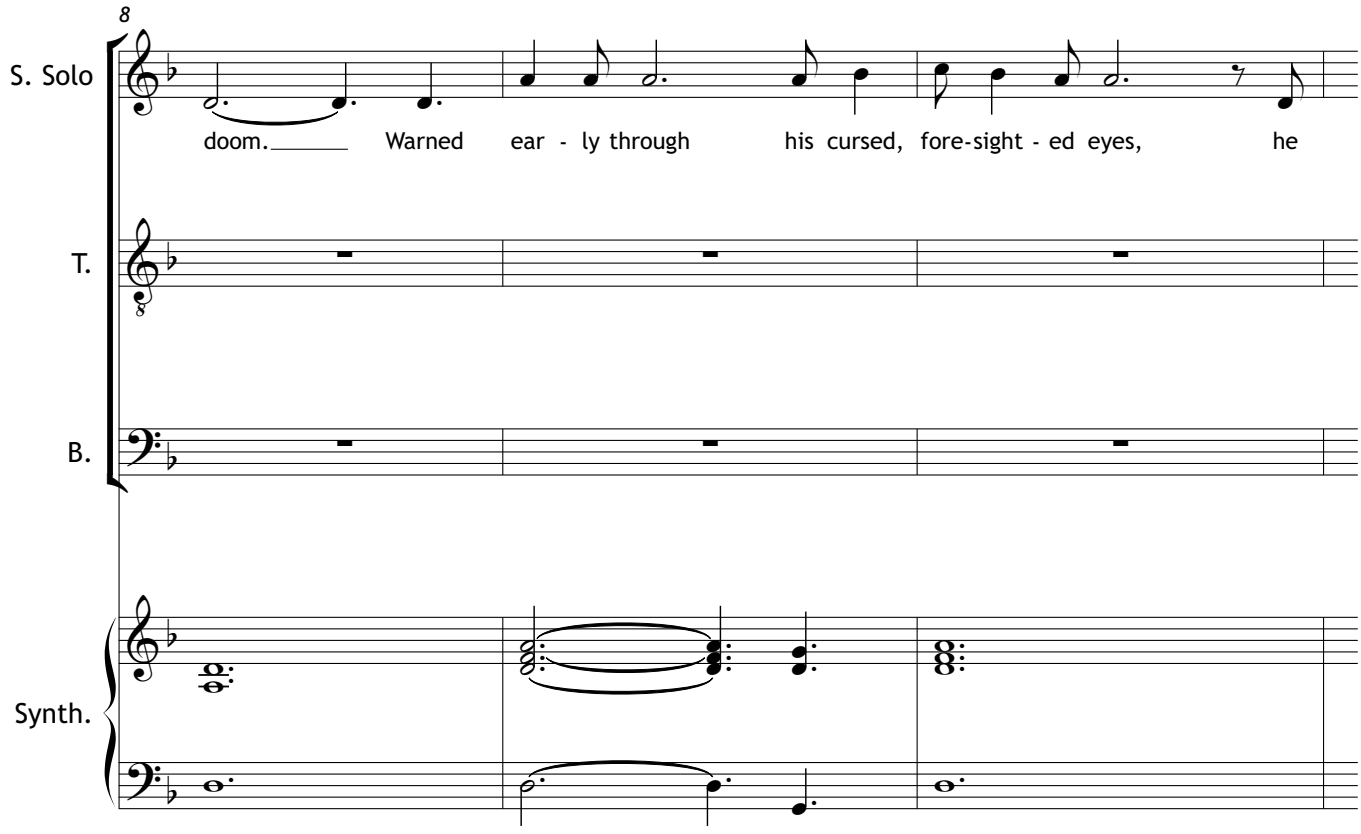

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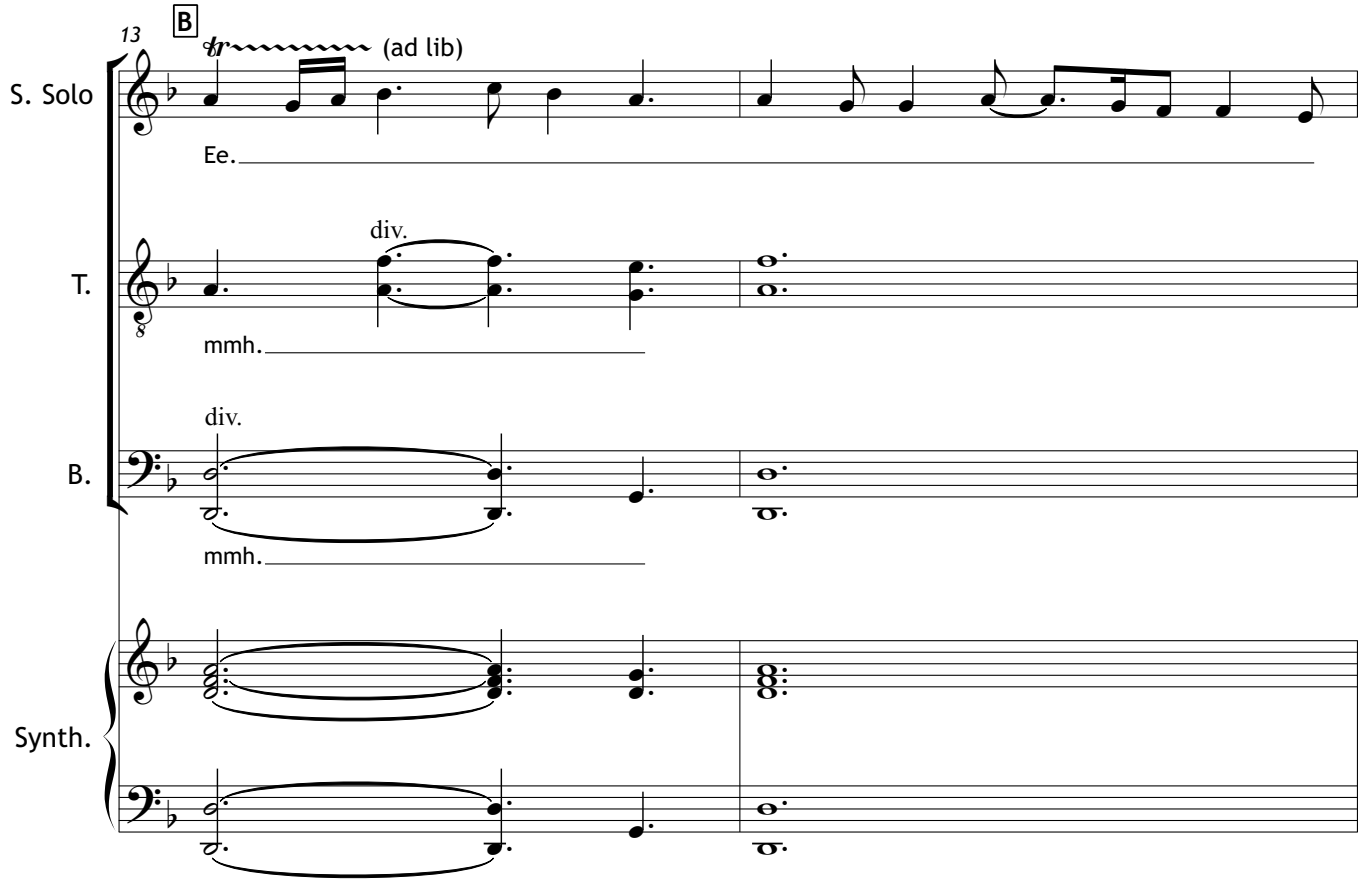

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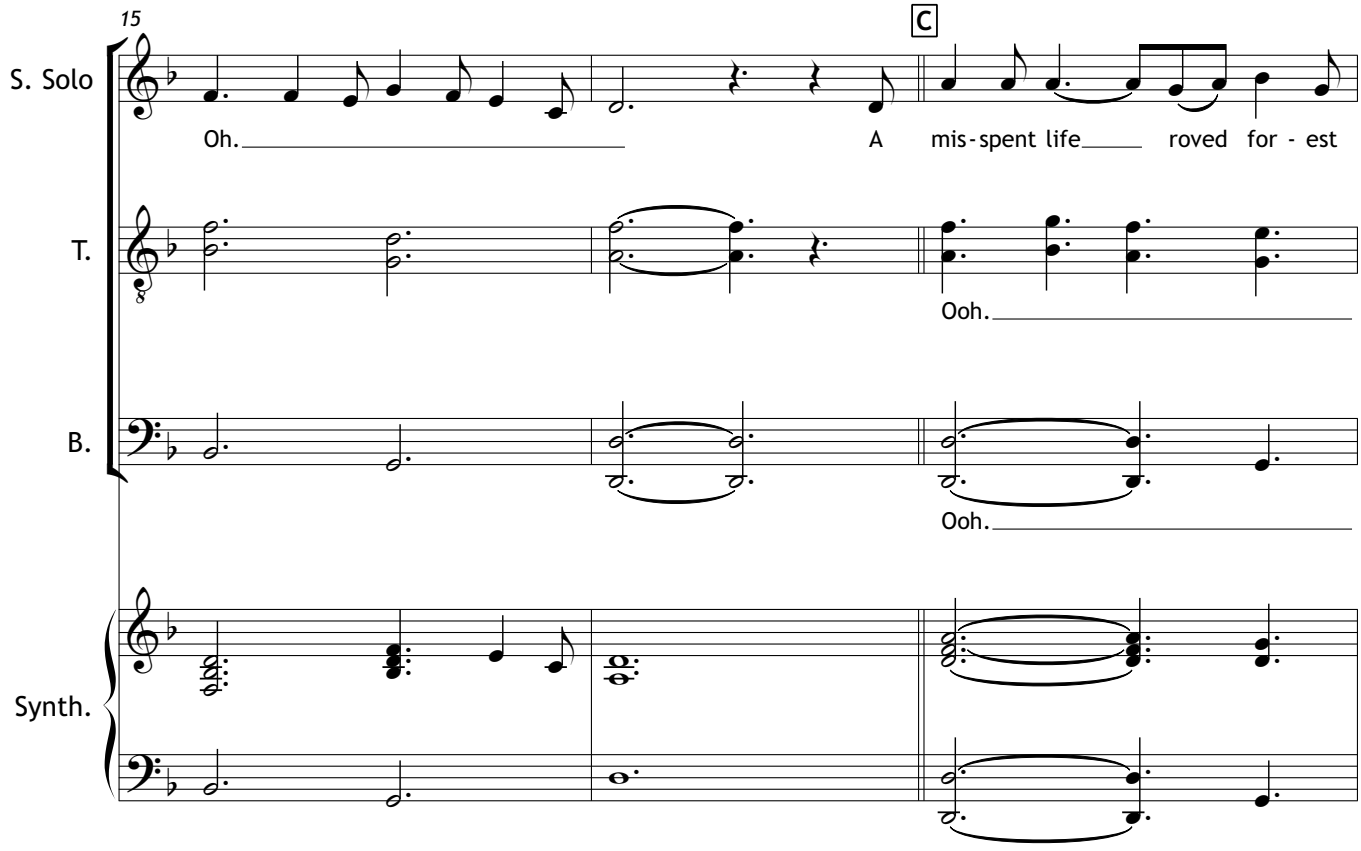

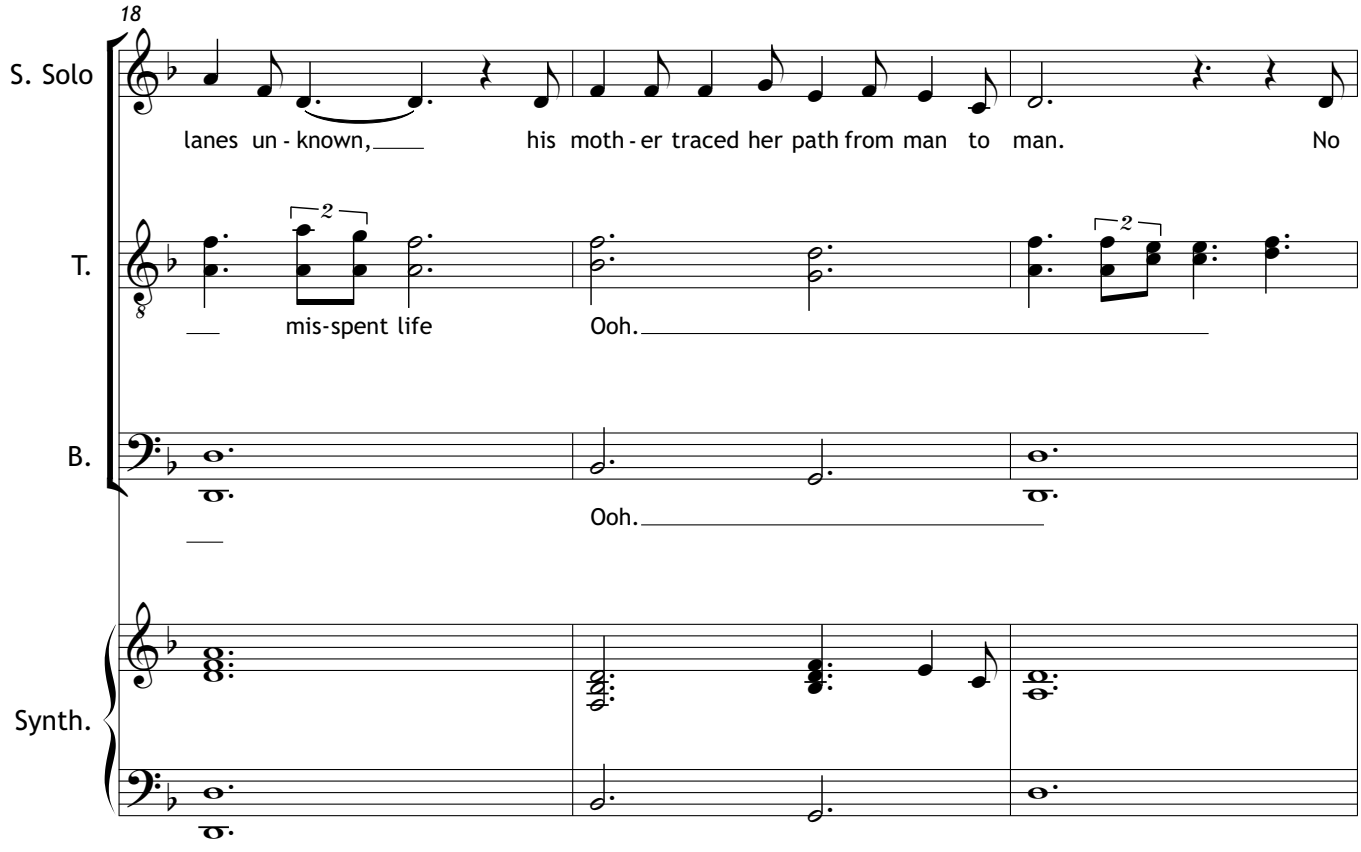

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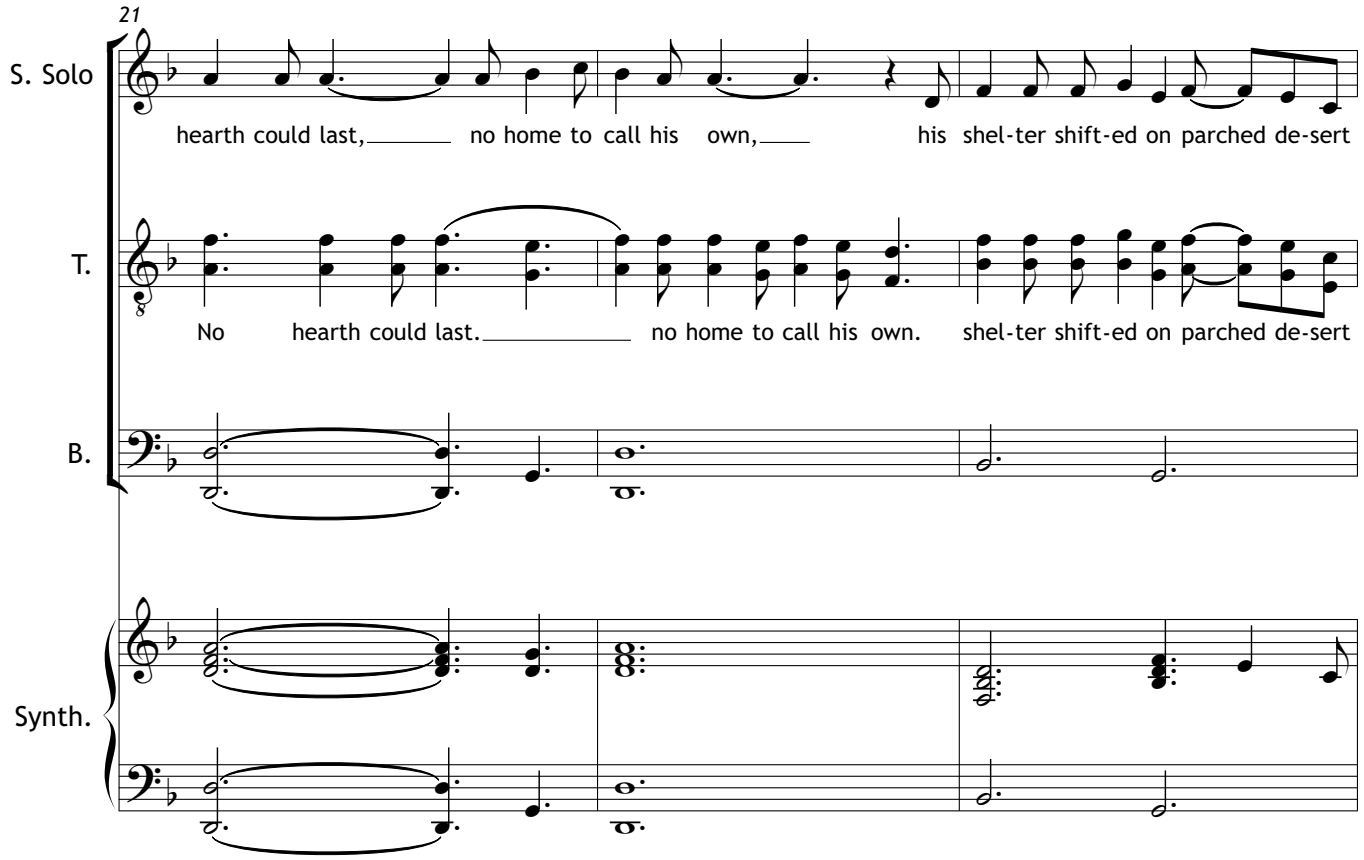

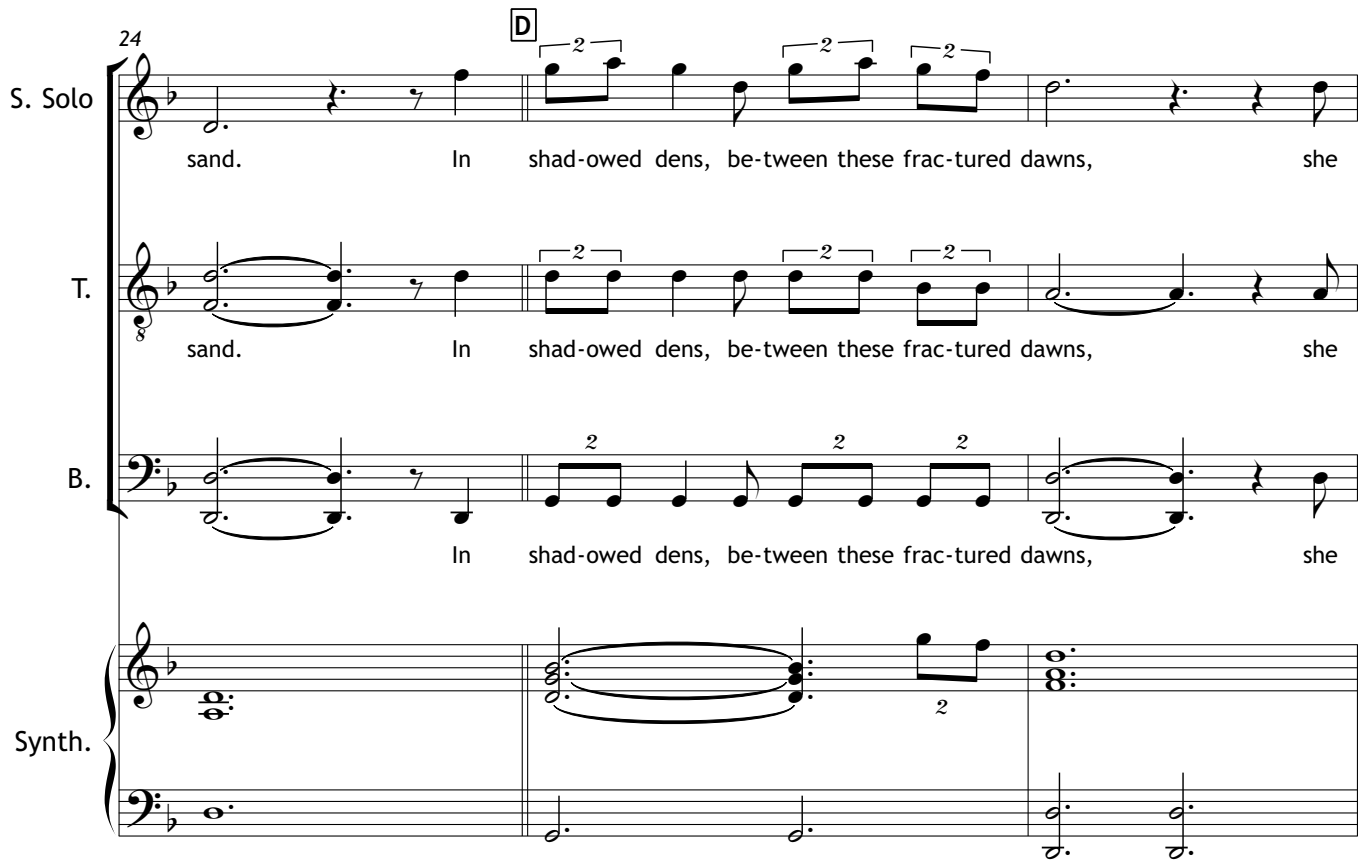

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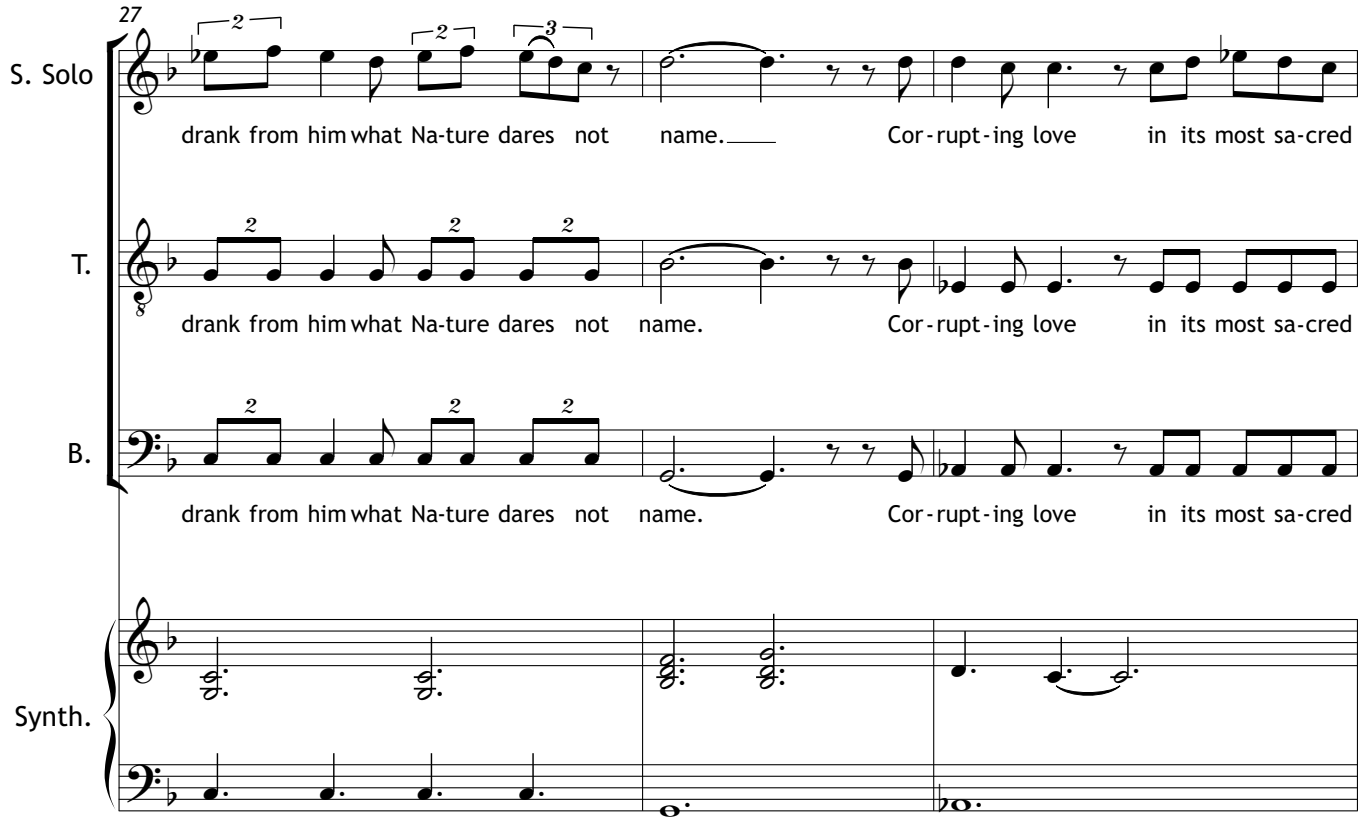

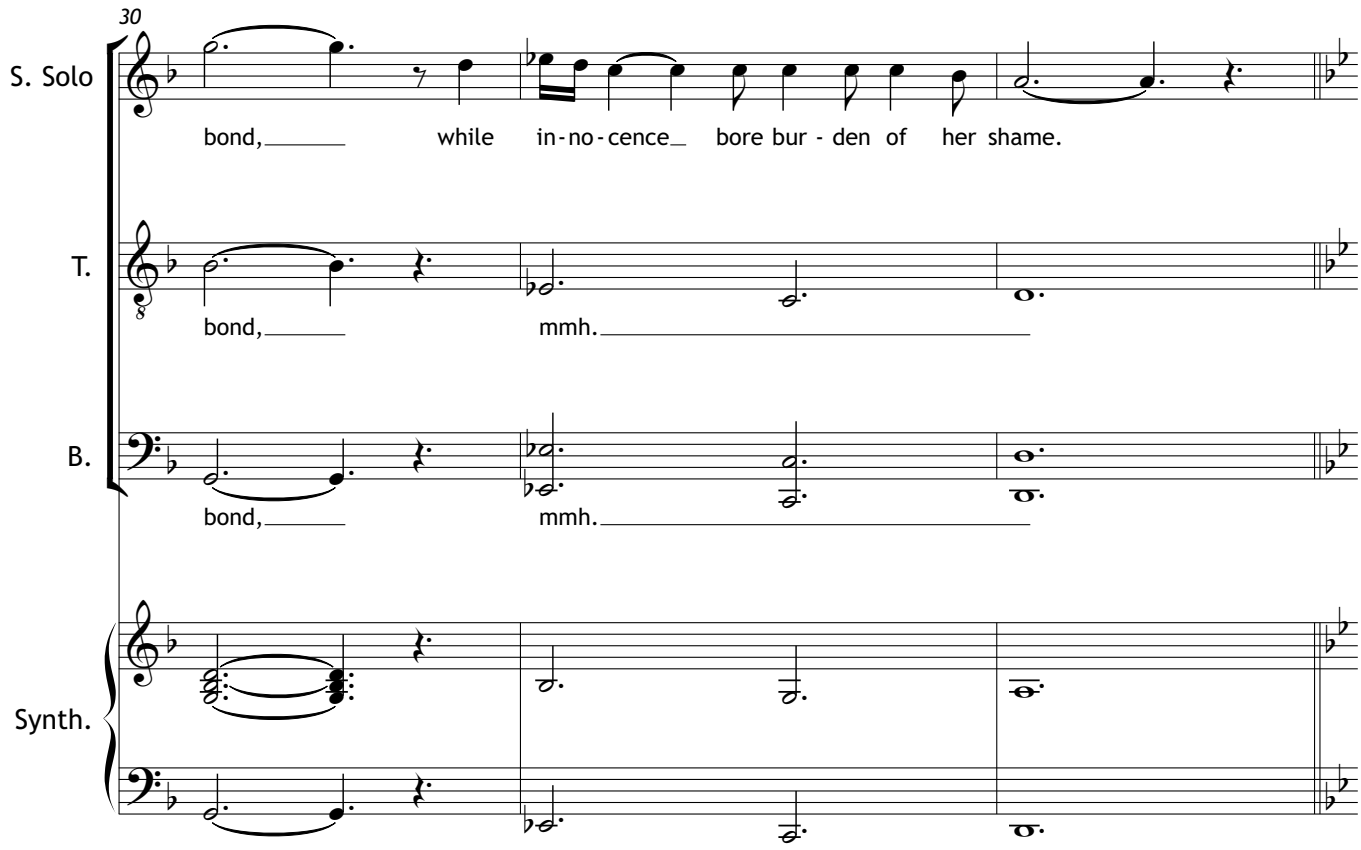

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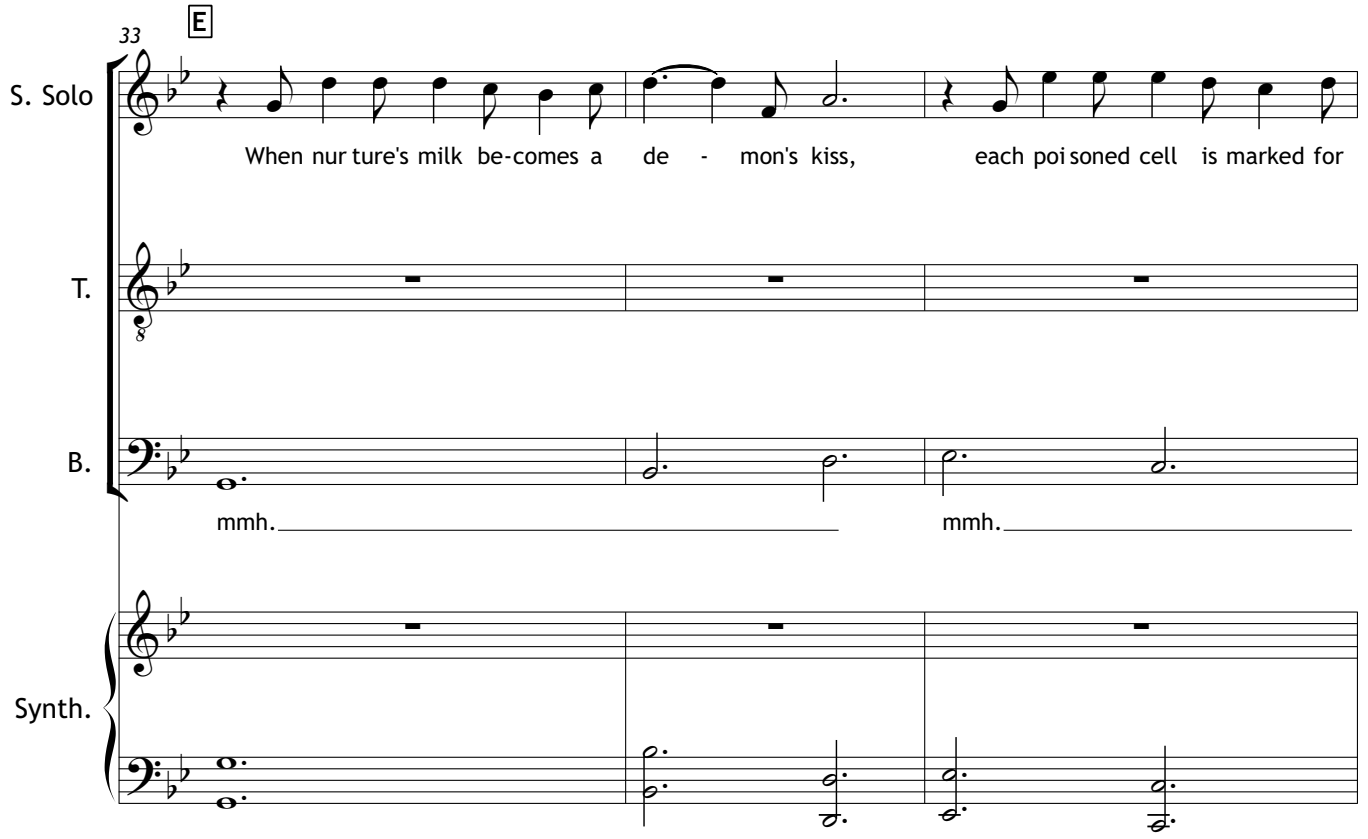

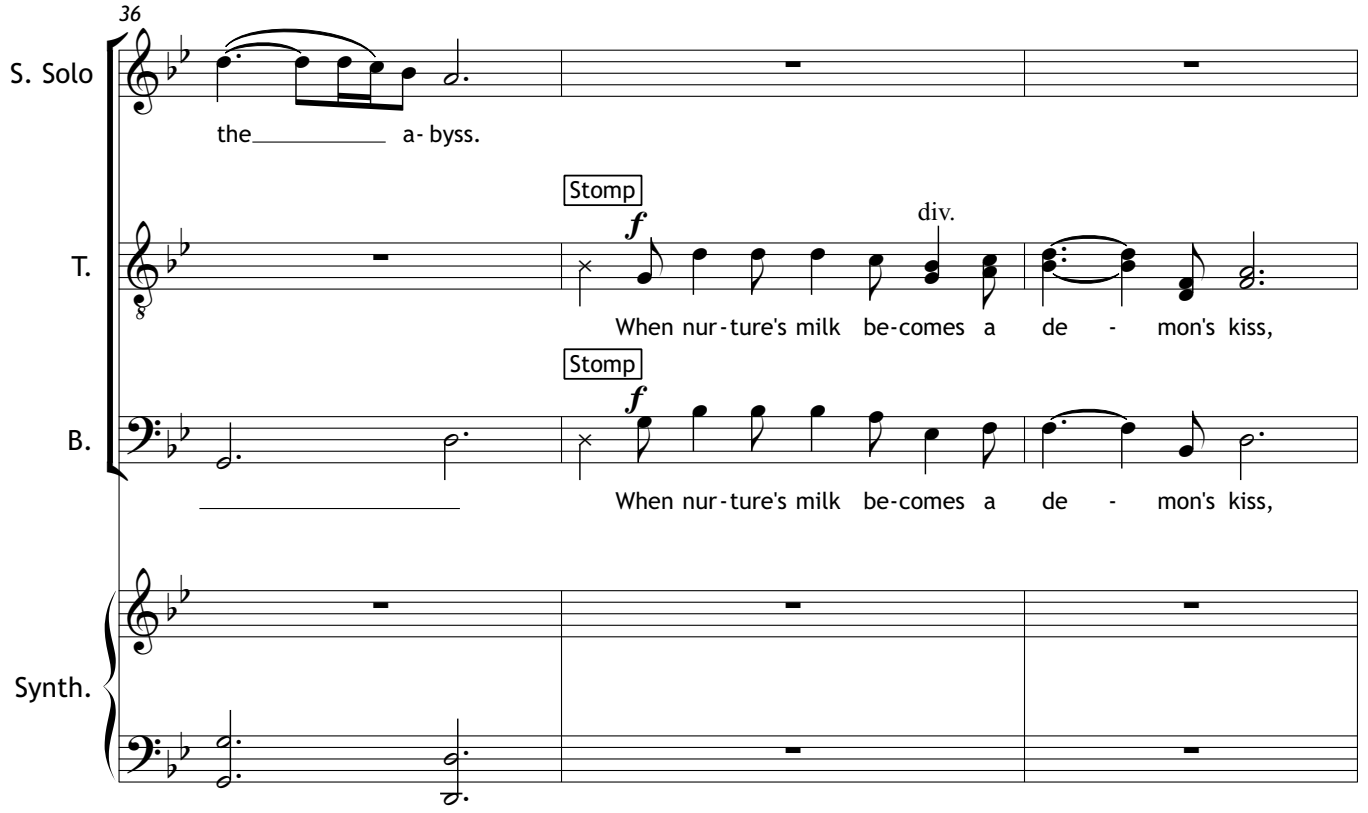

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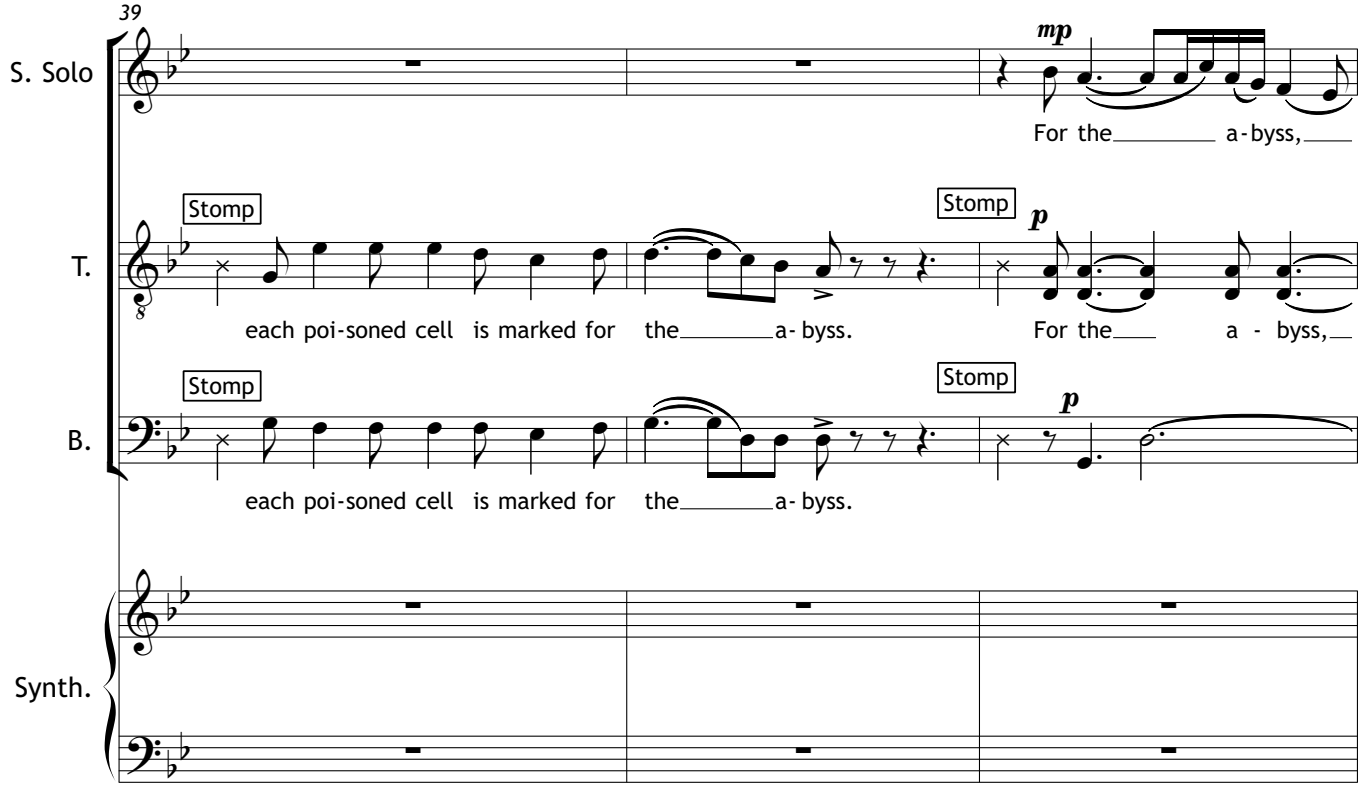
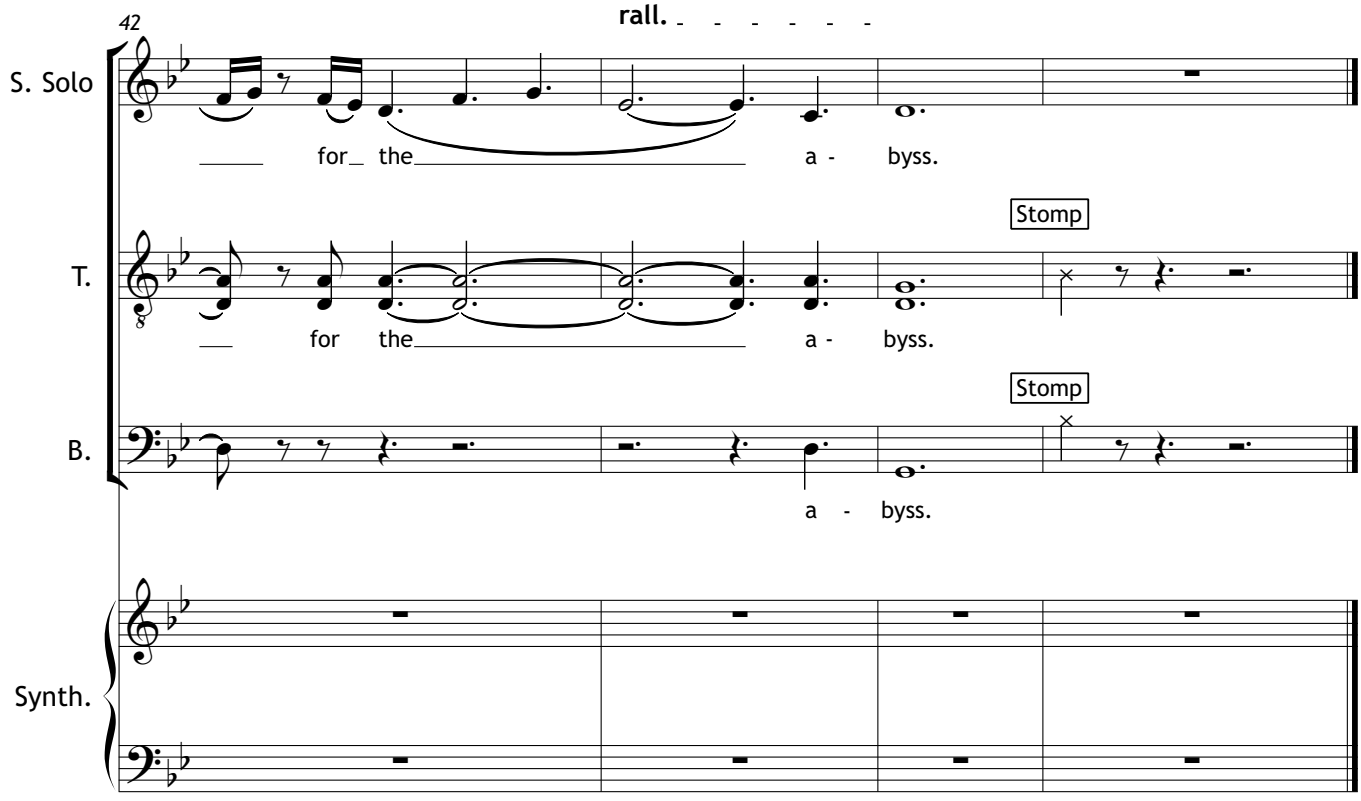

39
S. Solo
T.
B.
Synth.
mp
For the a-byss,
Stomp
each poi-soned cell is marked for the a-byss.
p
For the a - byss,
each poi-soned cell is marked for the a-byss.


42
rall.
S. Solo
T.
B.
Synth.
for the a - byss.
Stomp
for the a - byss.
a - byss.

3. Once upon a Time, Part 3

This sonnet is a flashback, the third of the "Once Upon a Time" quartet of related pieces, where the poet's childhood is recast as a fairy tale. *Part 3* dramatizes the arrival of the Stargirl in the poet's life. She is cast as a transformative power and described in mythical terms that are celestial and salvific.

Compared to *Part 1* and *Part 2*, her entrance into his awareness is a "candle in the dark" moment where, to his psychological perception, she is the light in the emptiness of his existence, delivering him through otherworldly love. He once told her that he felt like a creature cowering in a dark cavern, and that she was the radiance of an angel appearing in that void. Her presence, their brief and troubled time together, was the first time he felt truly loved. Through her love, he felt that he might have some kind of worth, that the doom he felt hanging over him from childhood was not inevitable. He was madly in love with her, and that such a brightly being would seemingly return this affection was transformative.

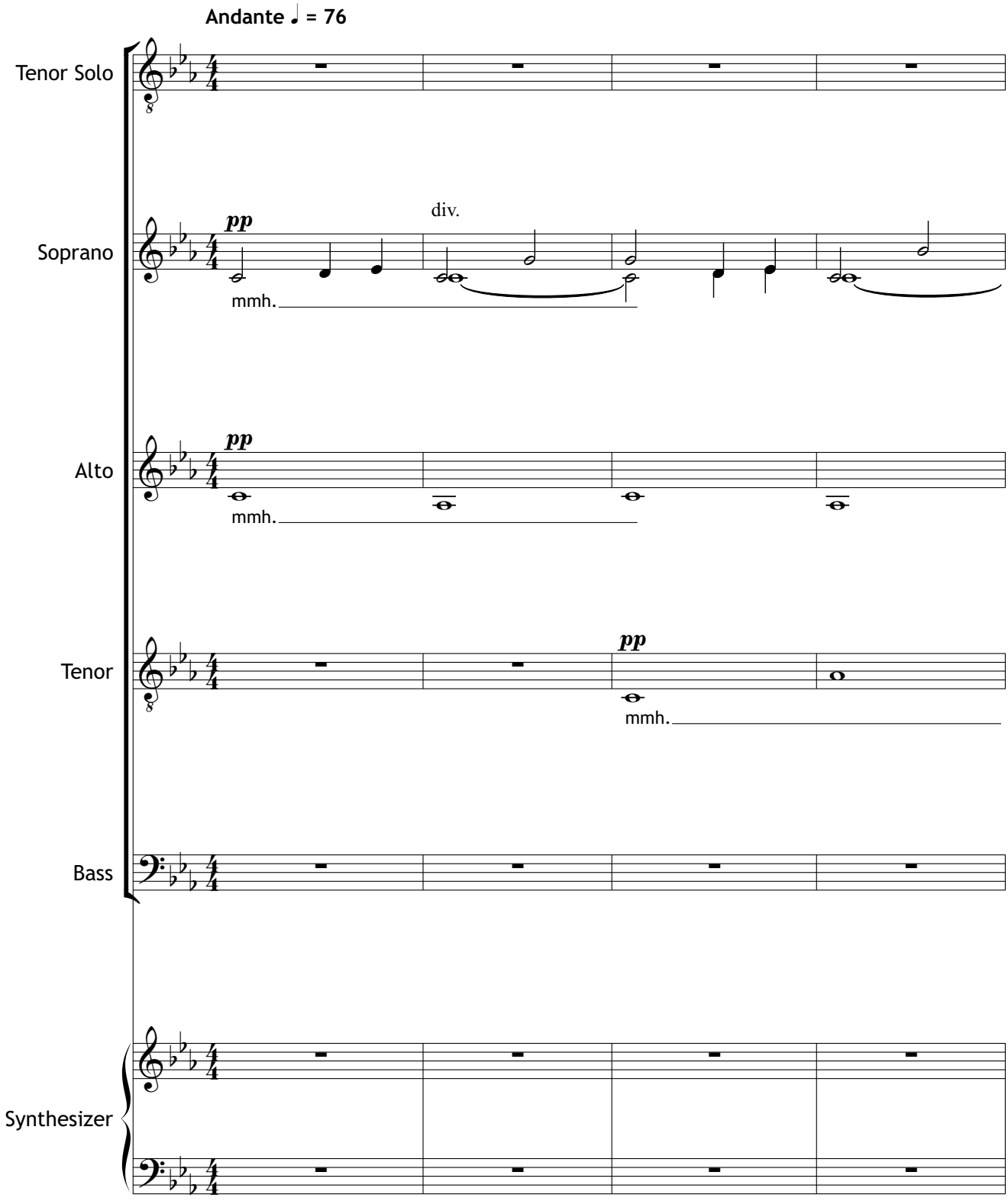
However, the poem begins with *"Designers of his doom"*, personifying the forces of existence as maleficent puppet masters, who placed him in the clutches of perversion as a child to wreck his psyche and then opened a portal to heaven briefly (*"one brief eon, ever filled with light"*), all the while planning something worse in the fall from this grace that would follow.

Once Upon A Time, Part 3

Senescence: Item 2 of "Tome of Stars"

Stargazer

Vocal Ensemble



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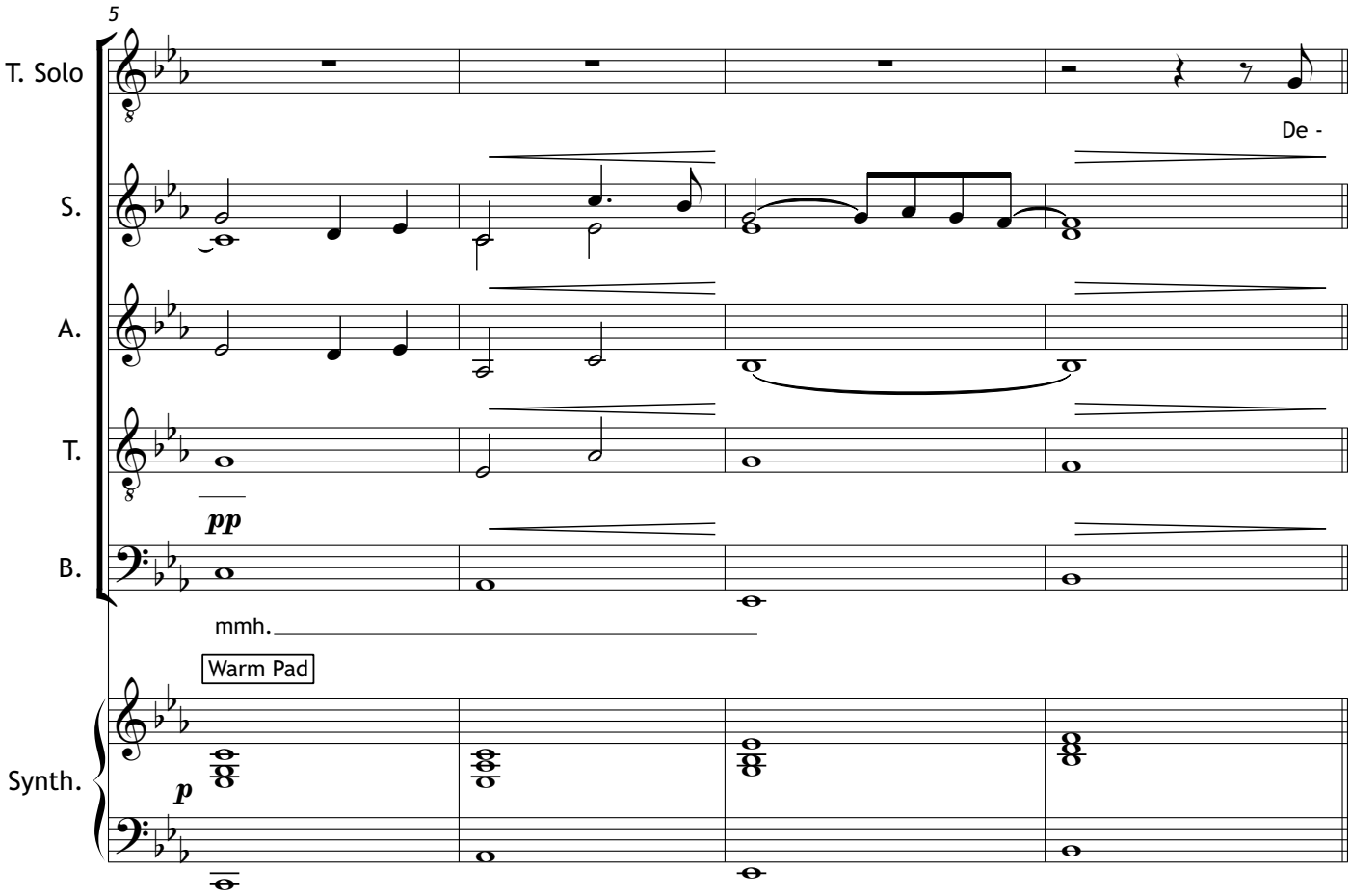

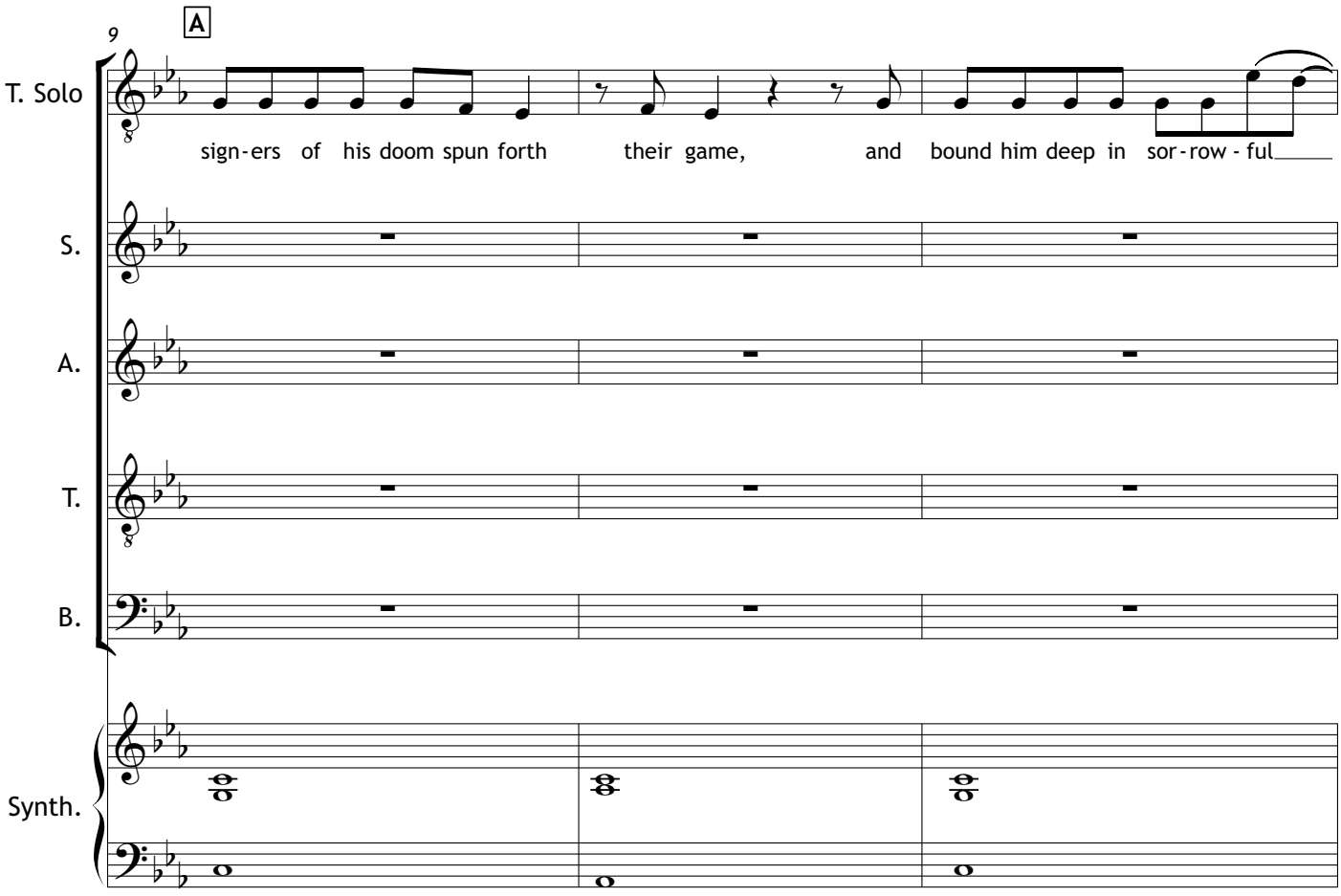

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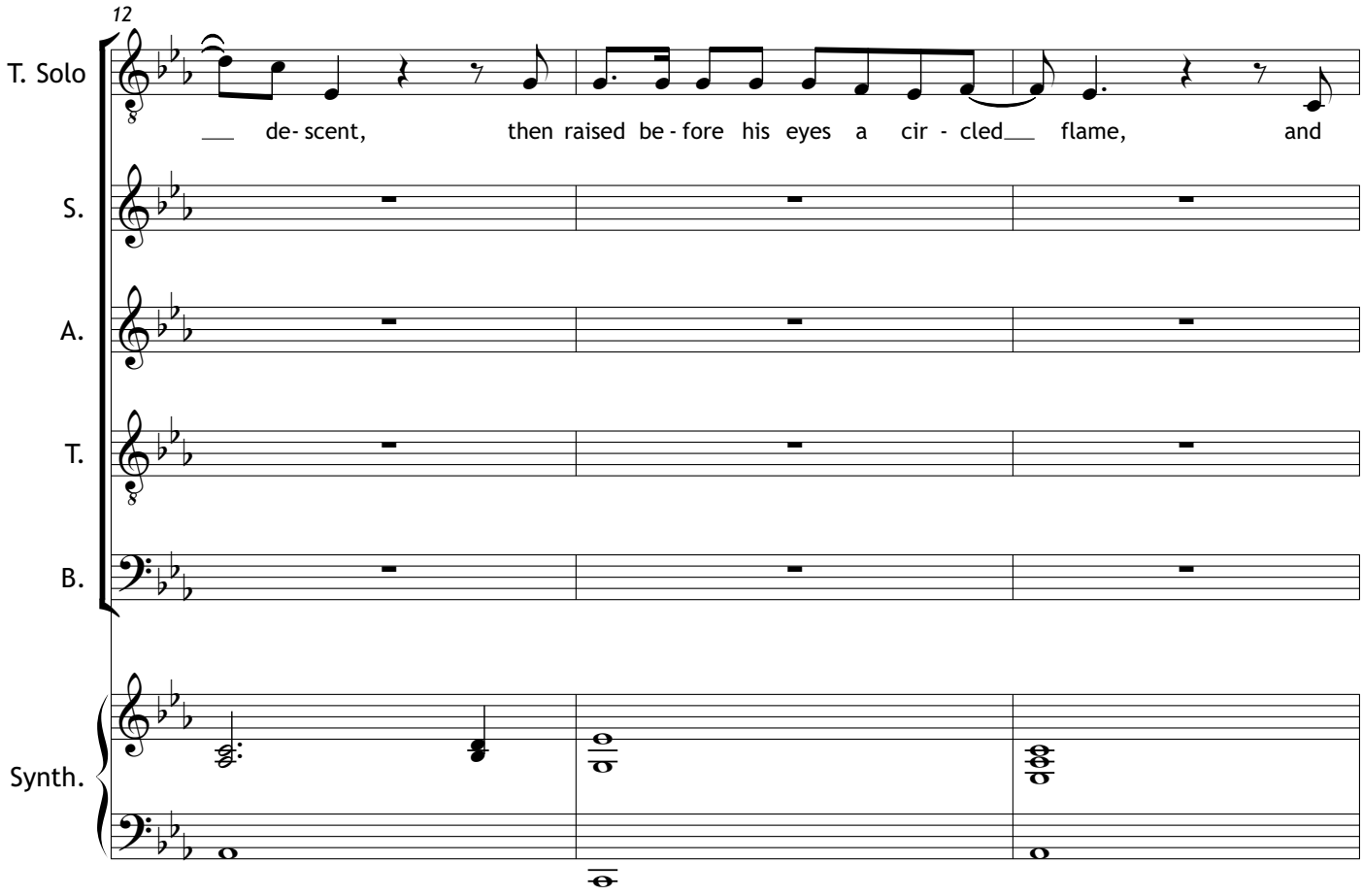
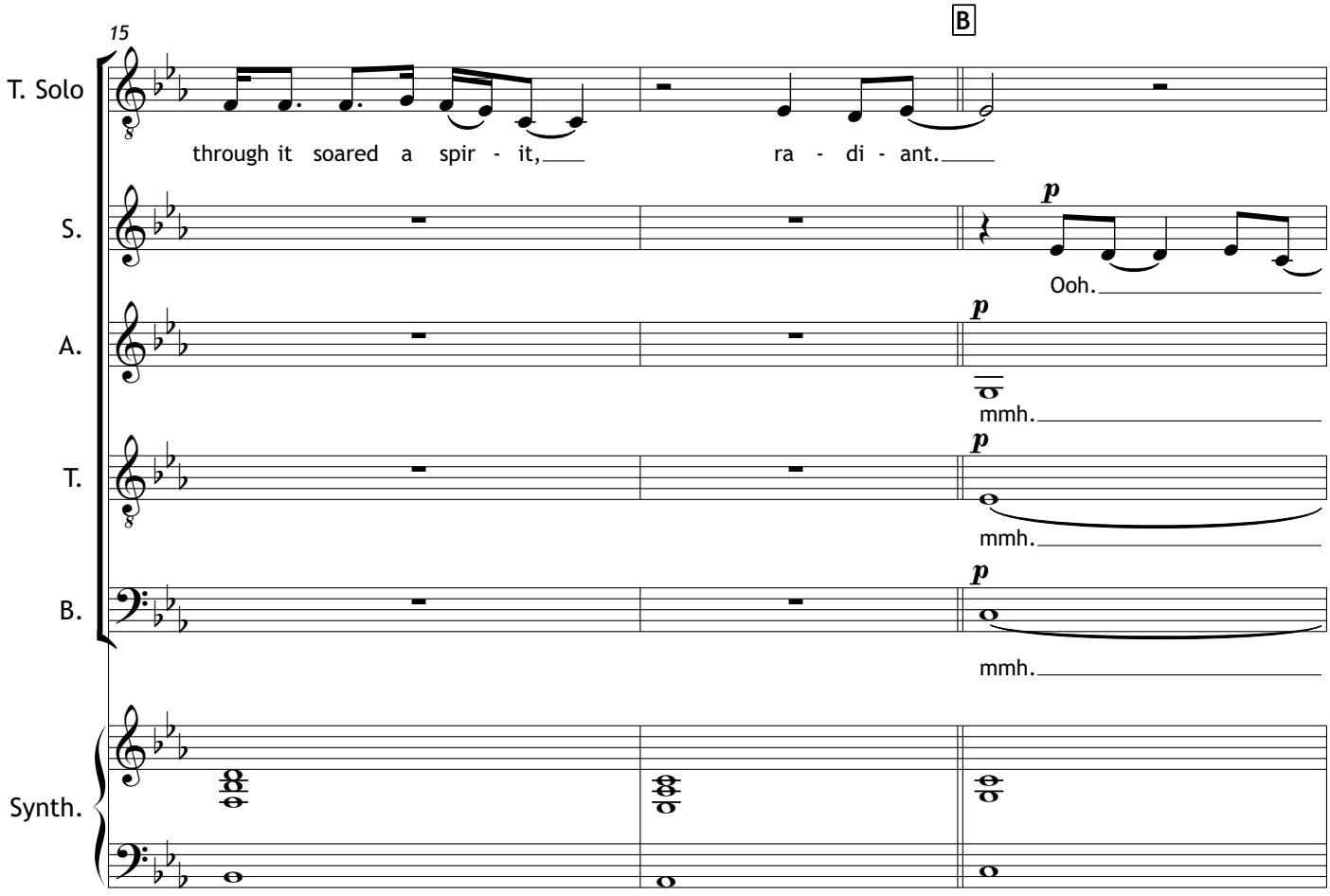
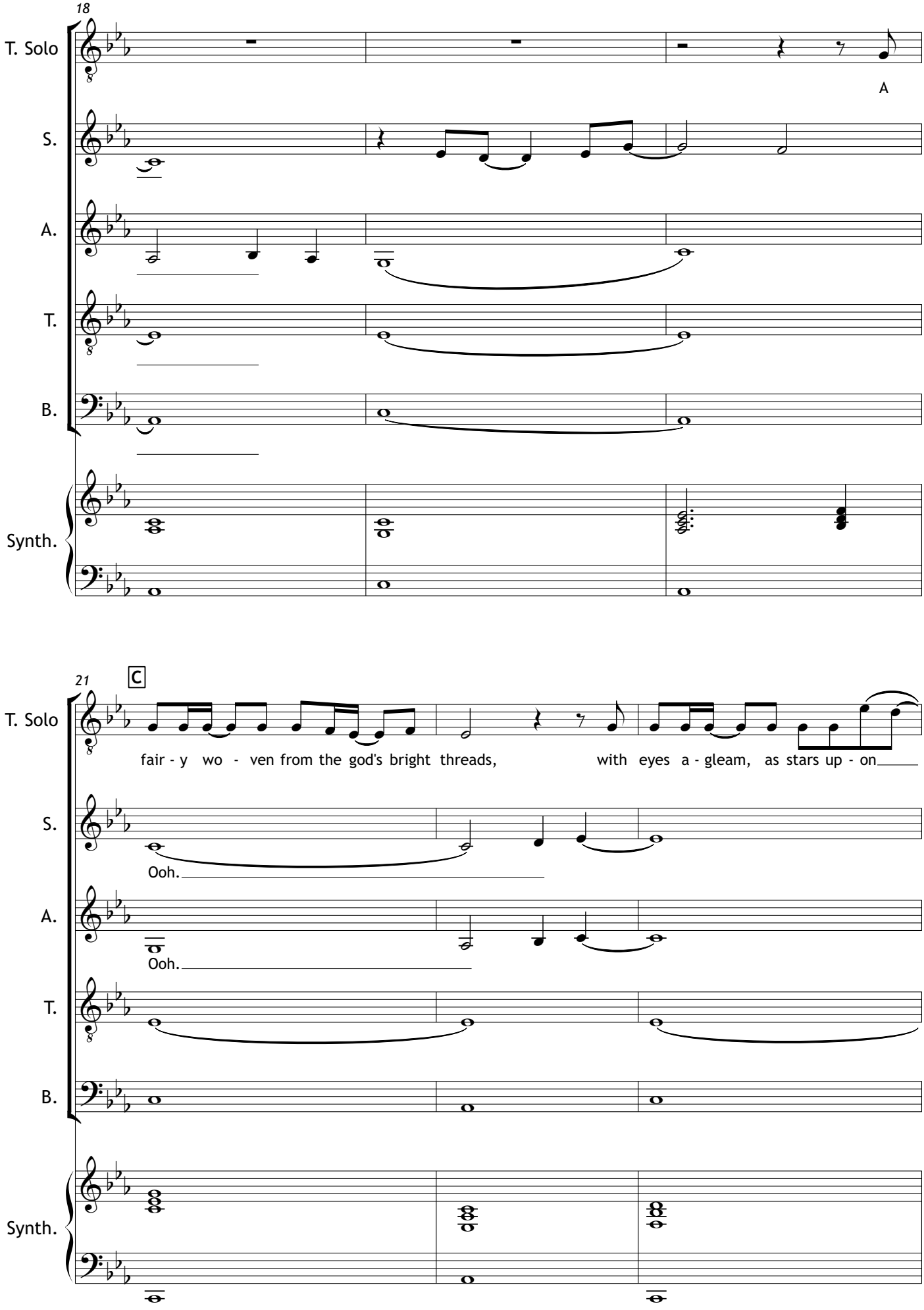

12
T. Solo
de- scent, then raised be - fore his eyes a cir - cled flame, and
S.
A.
T.
B.
Synth.


15
B
T. Solo
through it soared a spir - it, ra - di - ant.
S.
p
Ooh.
A.
p
mmh.
T.
p
mmh.
B.
p
mmh.
Synth.



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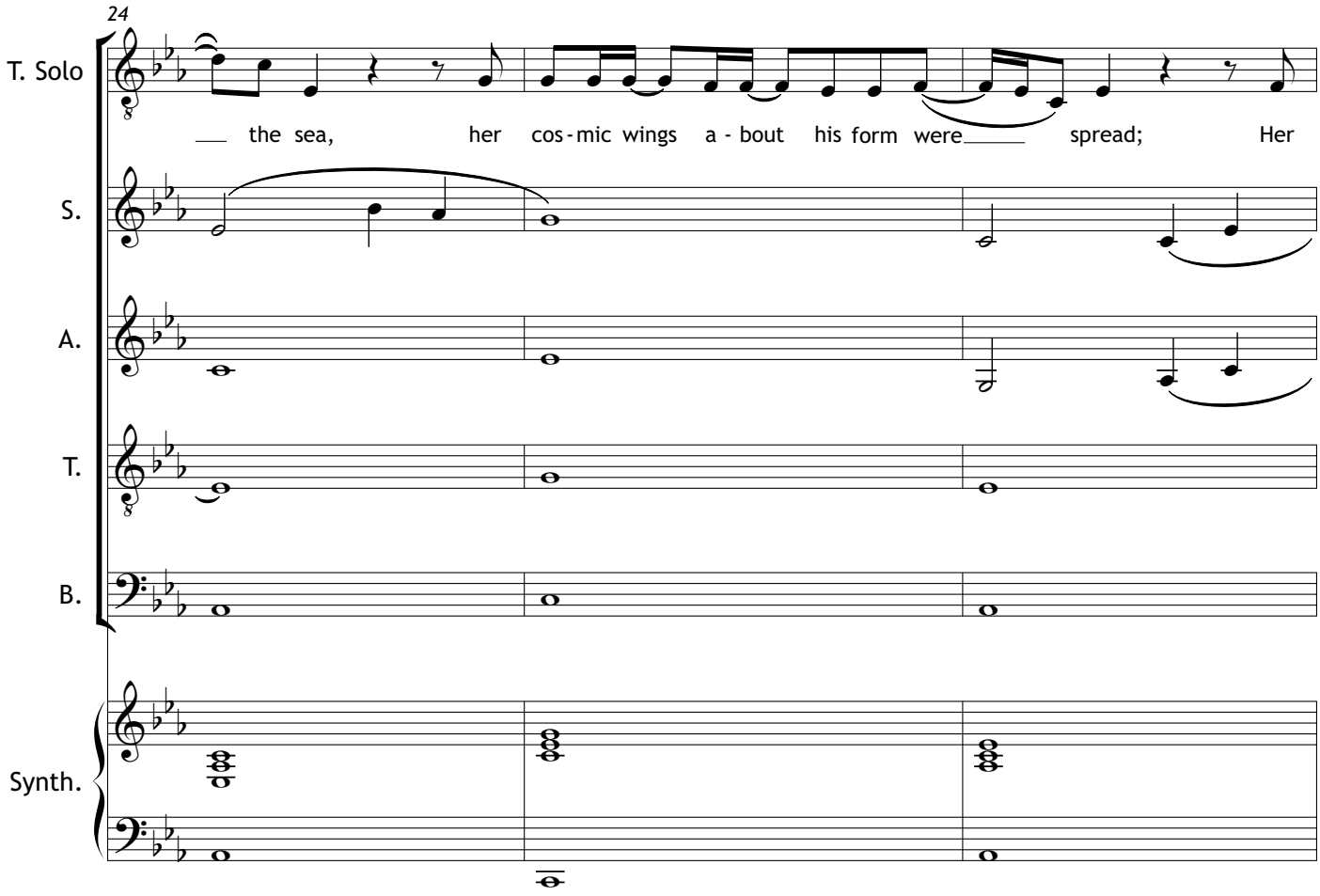

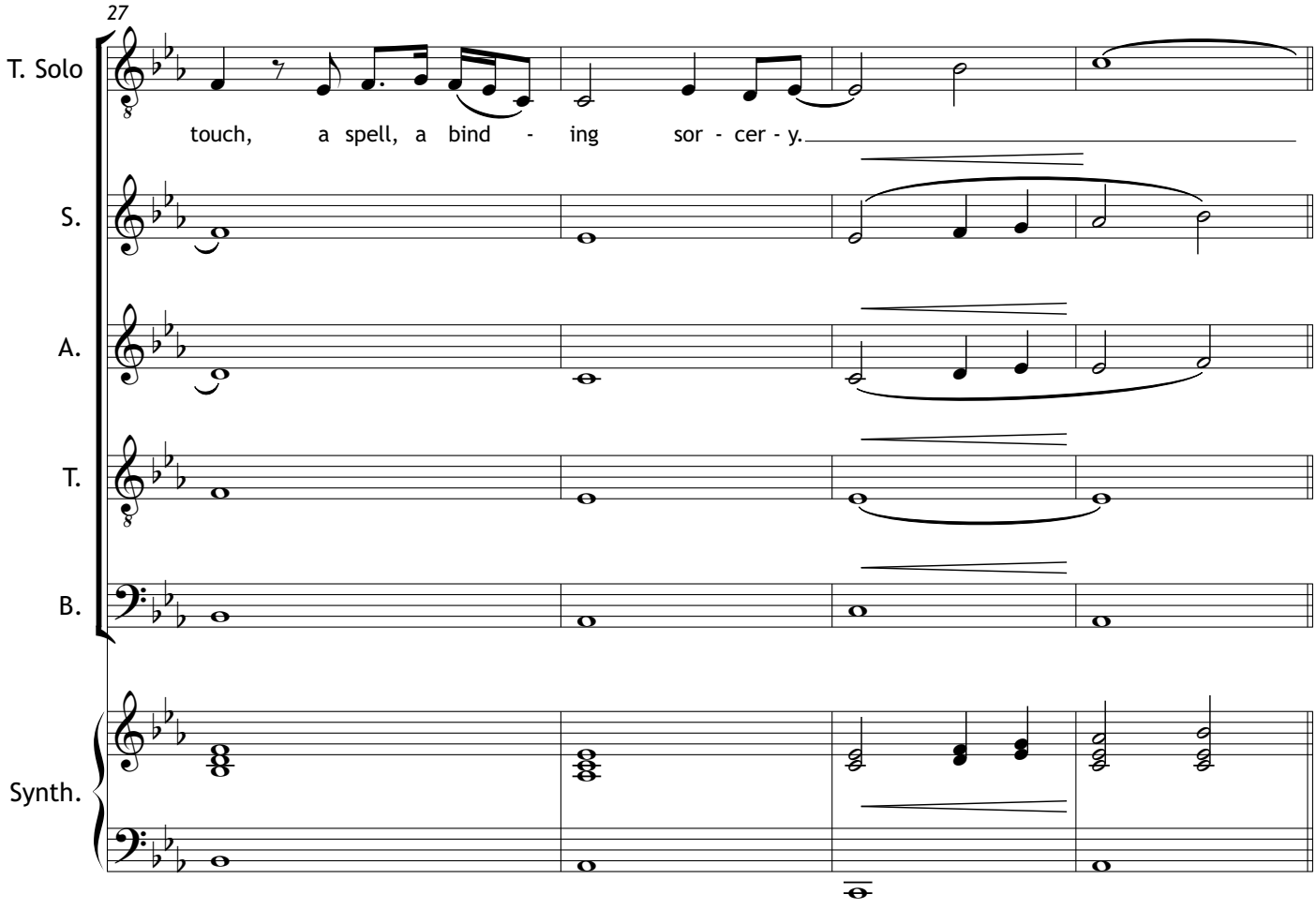

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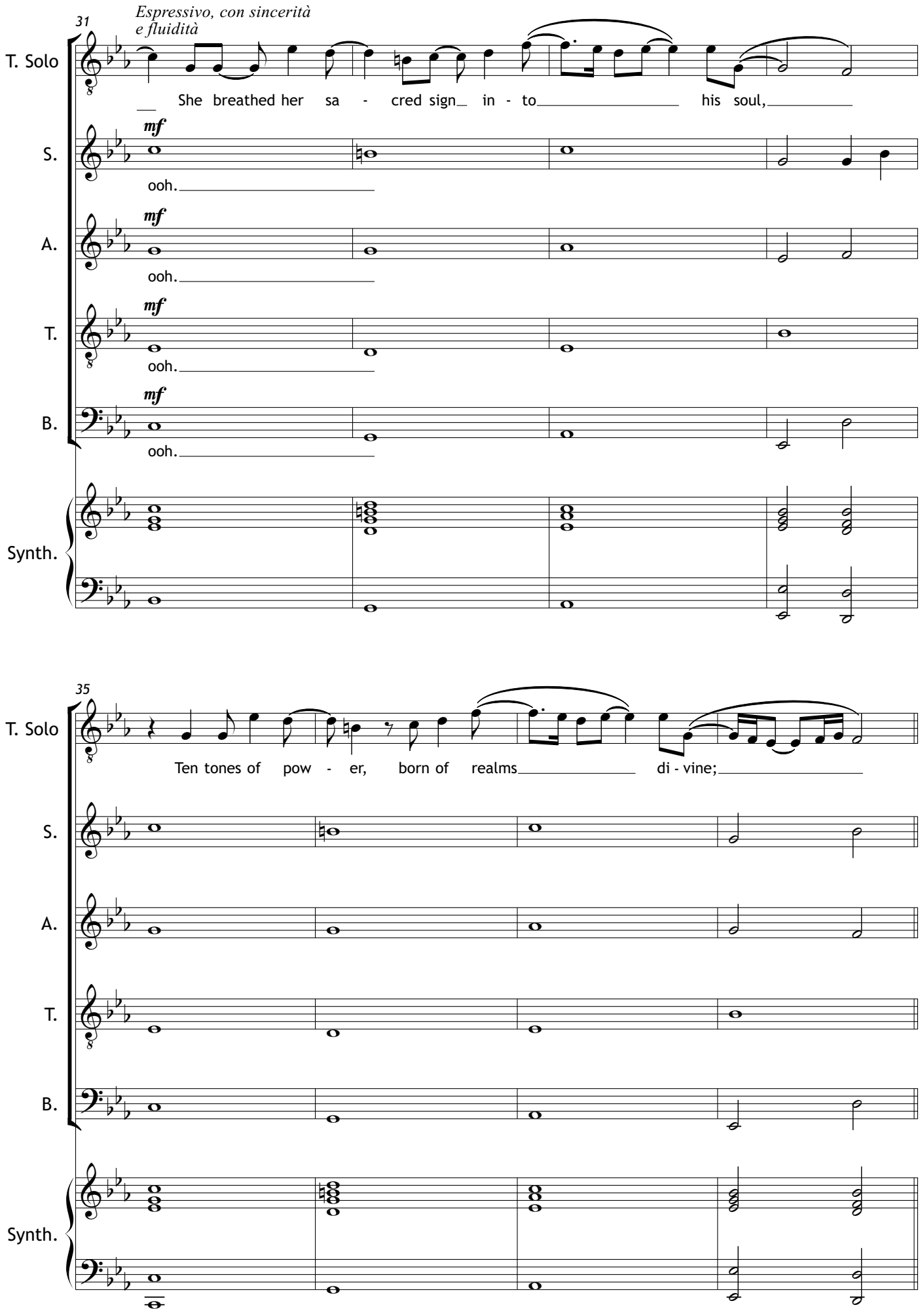

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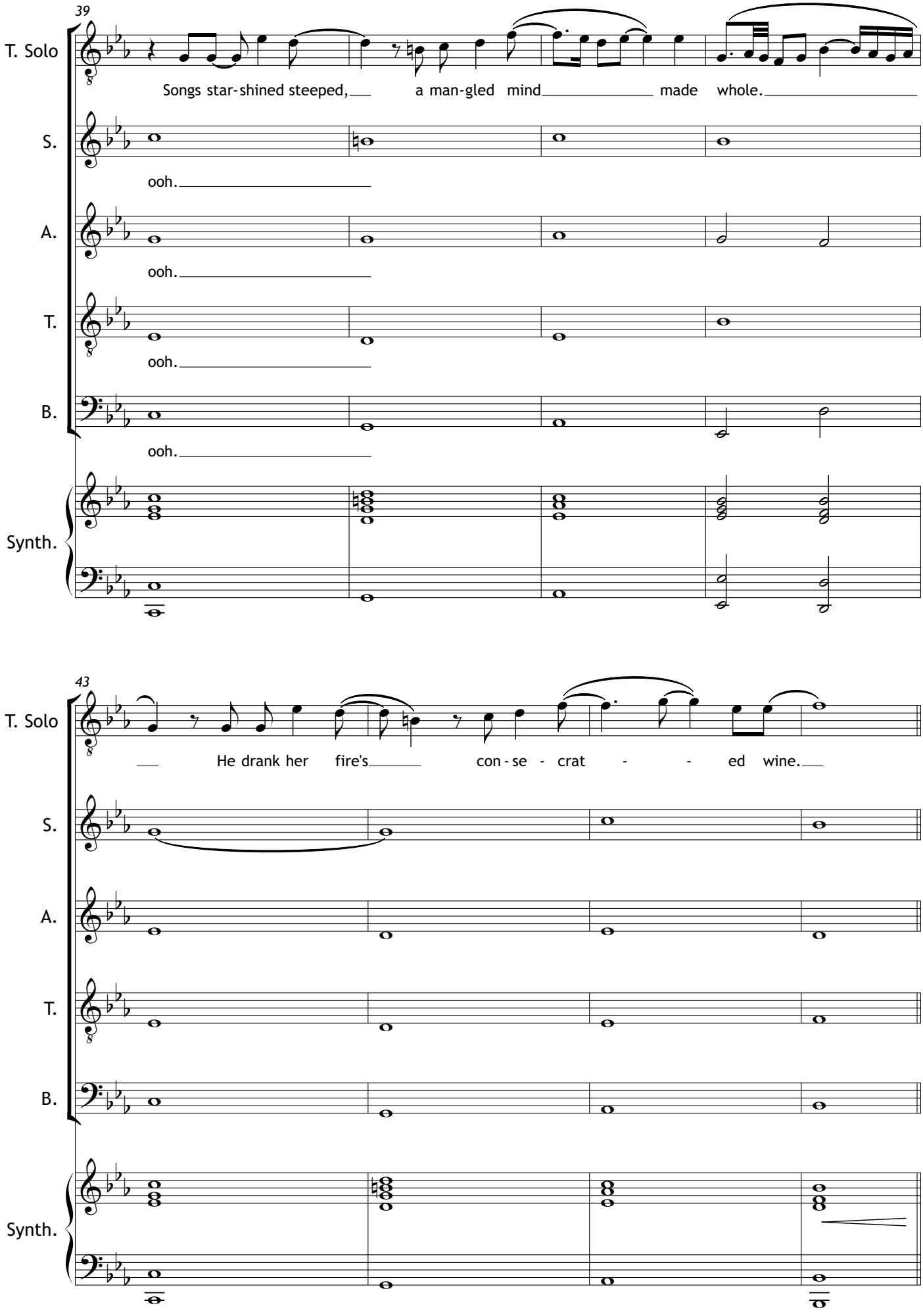
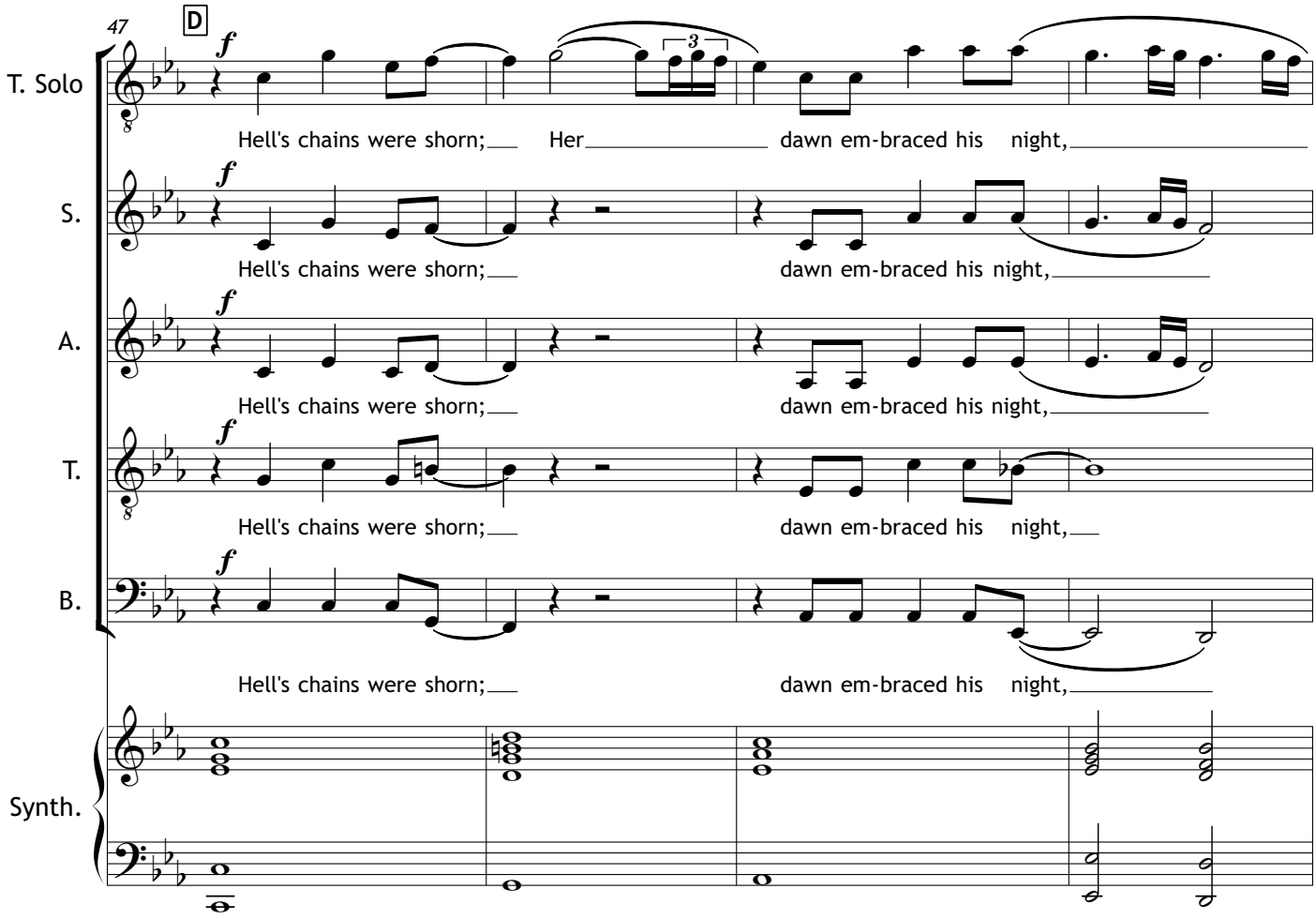
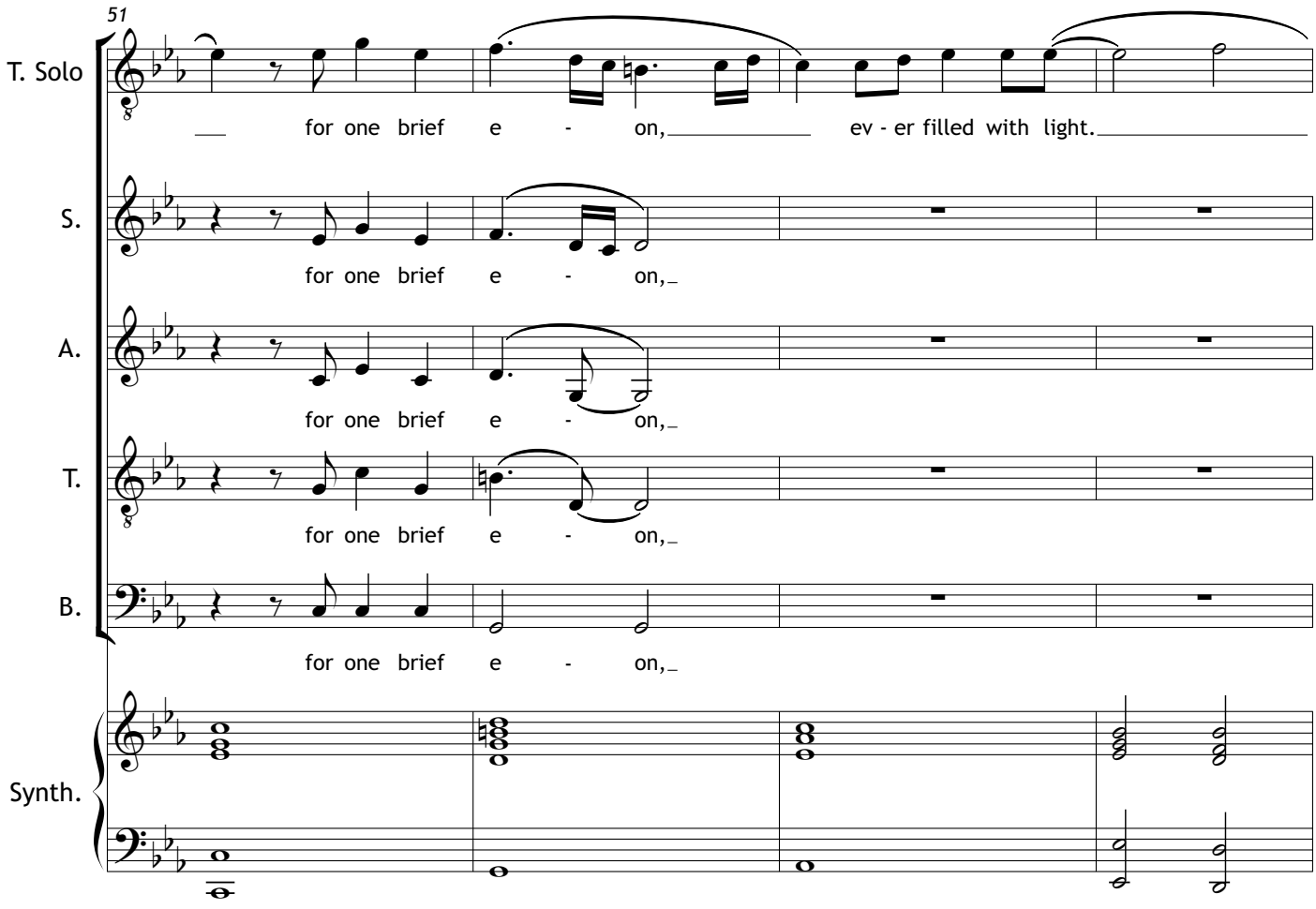

39
T. Solo
Songs star-shined steeped, a man-gled mind made whole.
S.
ooh.
A.
ooh.
T.
ooh.
B.
ooh.
Synth.
43
T. Solo
He drank her fire's con-se-crat-ed wine.
S.
A.
T.
B.
Synth.





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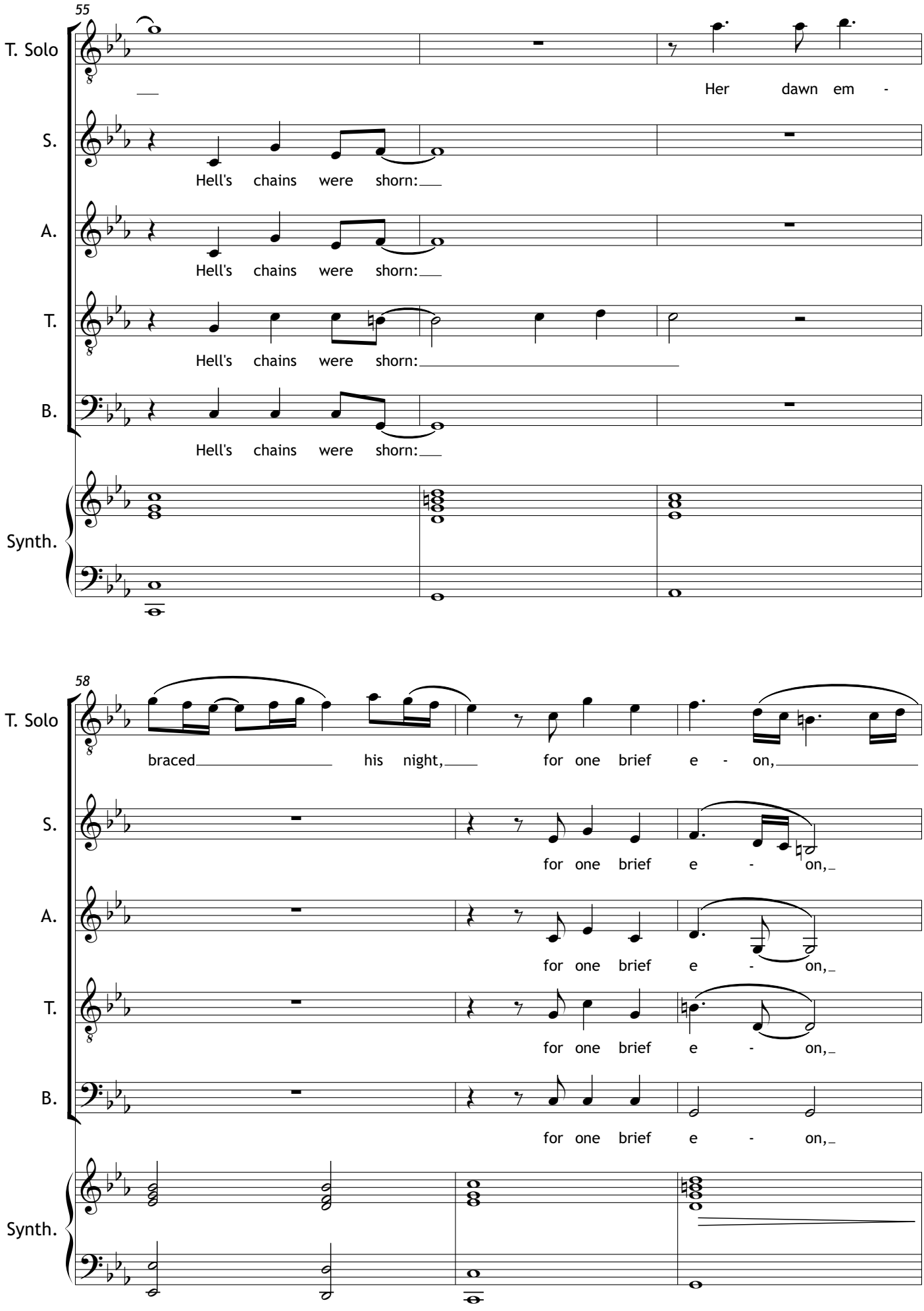

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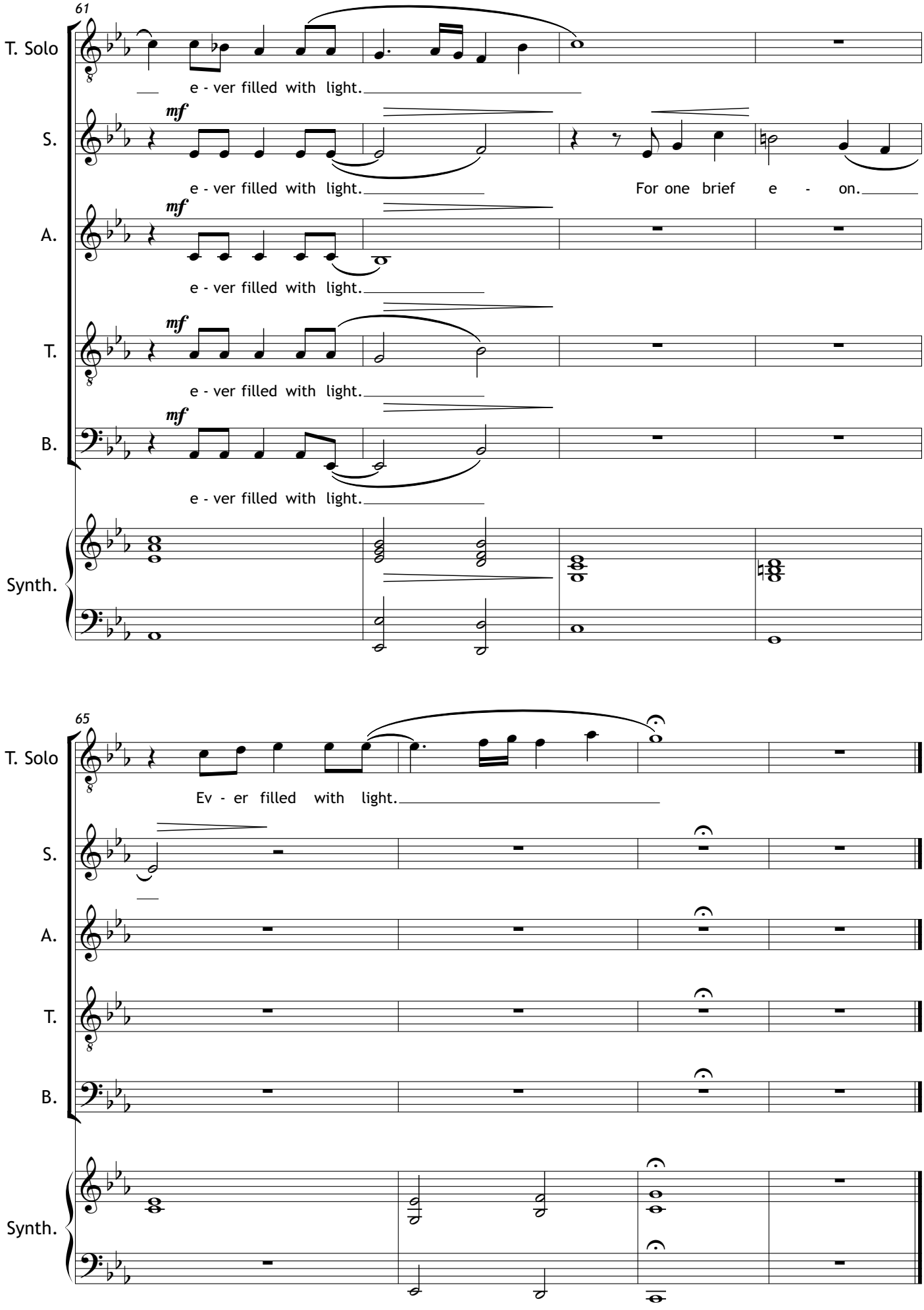

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9. Once upon a Time, Part 4

This sonnet is a flashback, the fourth and last of the "Once Upon a Time" quartet of related pieces, where the poet's childhood is recast as a fairy tale. *Part 4* is a rending exposition of the poet's failure to transcend his damaged psyche and its defects described in *Part 1* and *Part 2* (compulsive guilt, emotional self-betrayal, fight-or-flight emotional responses).

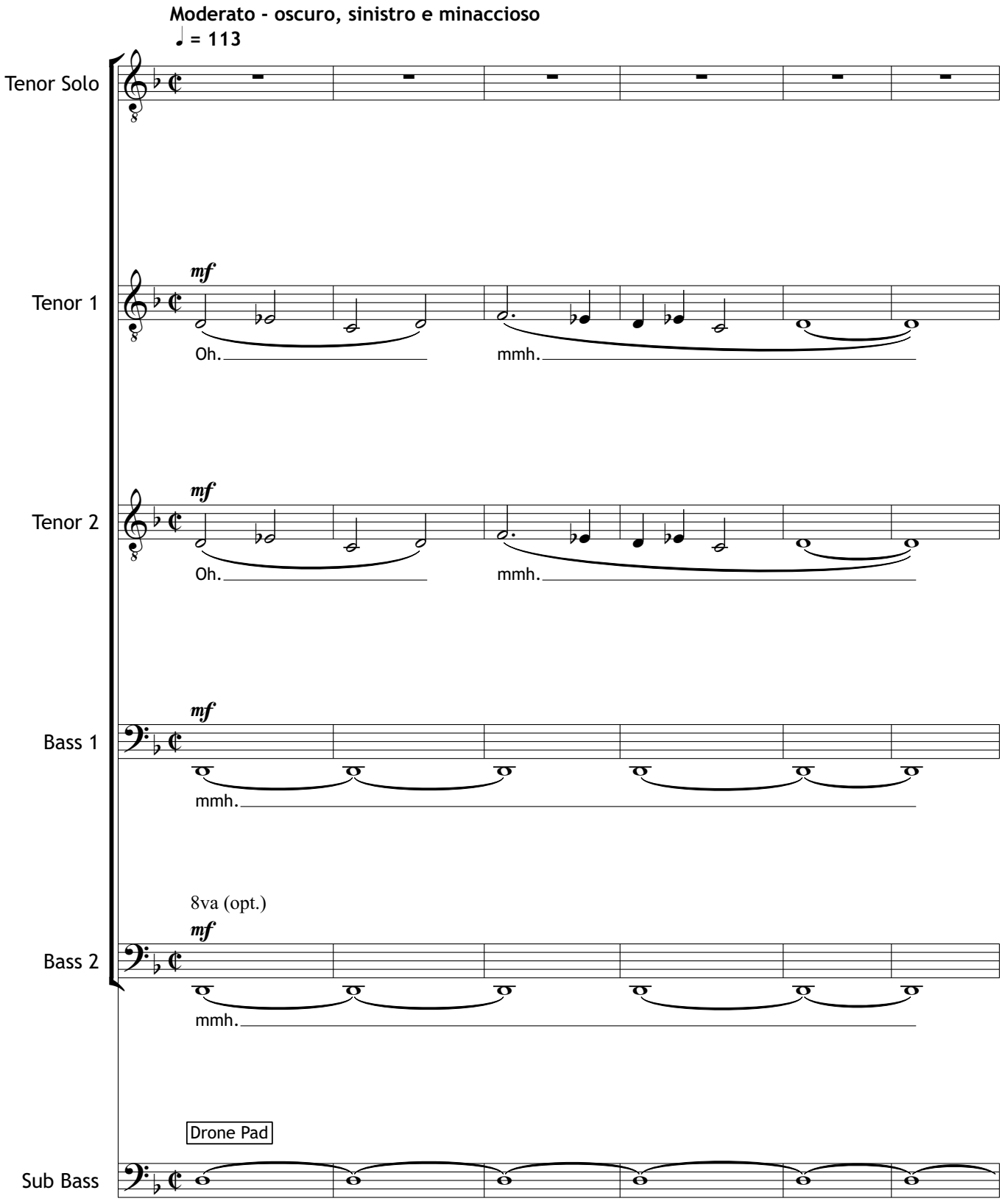
This leads to the loss of the one redemptive force he's ever felt: the Stargirl, her deliverance chronicled in *Part 3*. All the worse, her departure is one of ultimate judgment, her magical grace revoked, his person deemed unworthy of her love. The song ends as permanent exile from light into darkness, where the ending of *Part 1* is realized: *"each poisoned cell is marked for the abyss."*

Once Upon A Time, Part 4

Senescence: Item 2 of "Tome of Stars"

Stargazer

Vocal Ensemble



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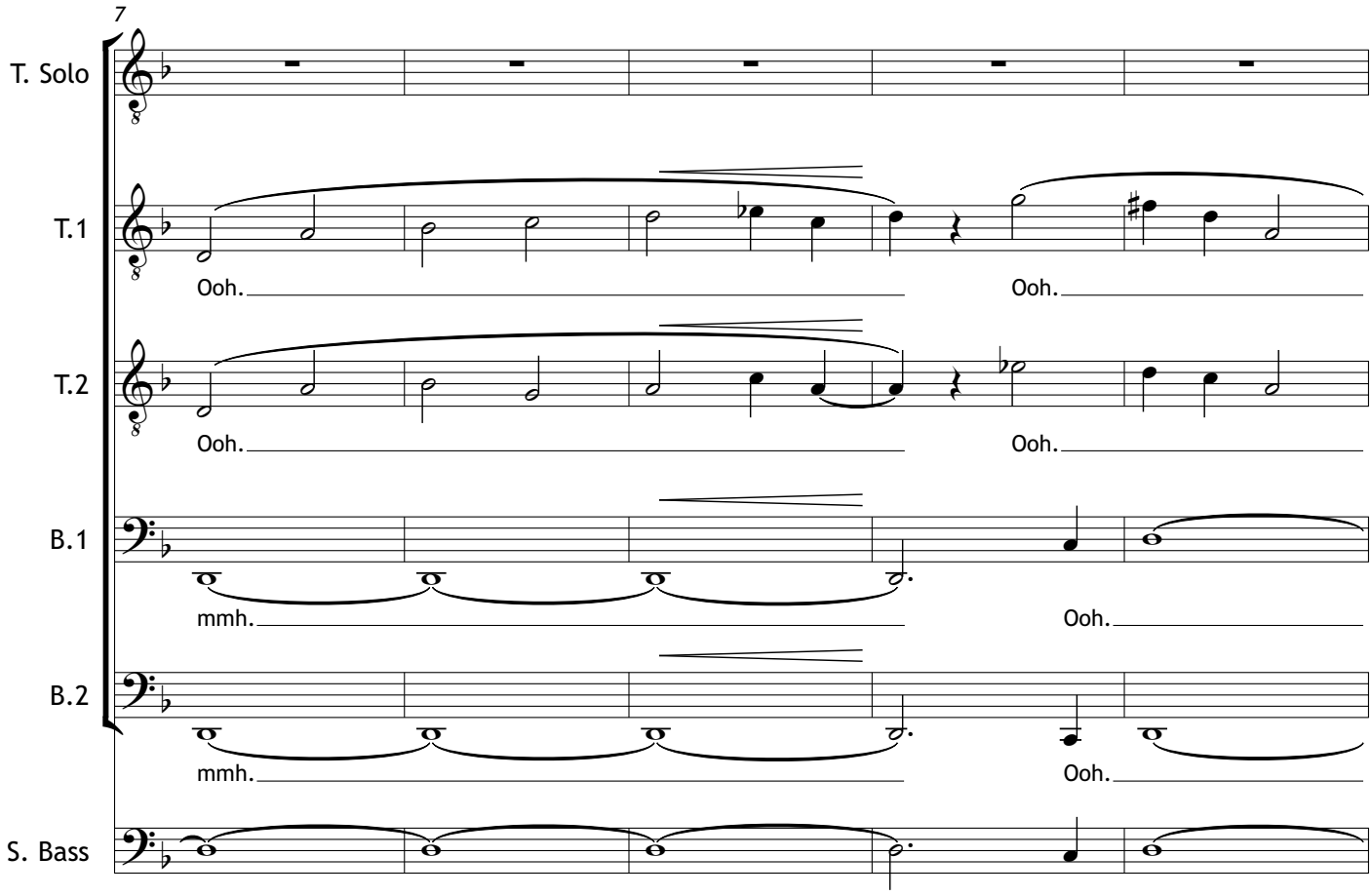
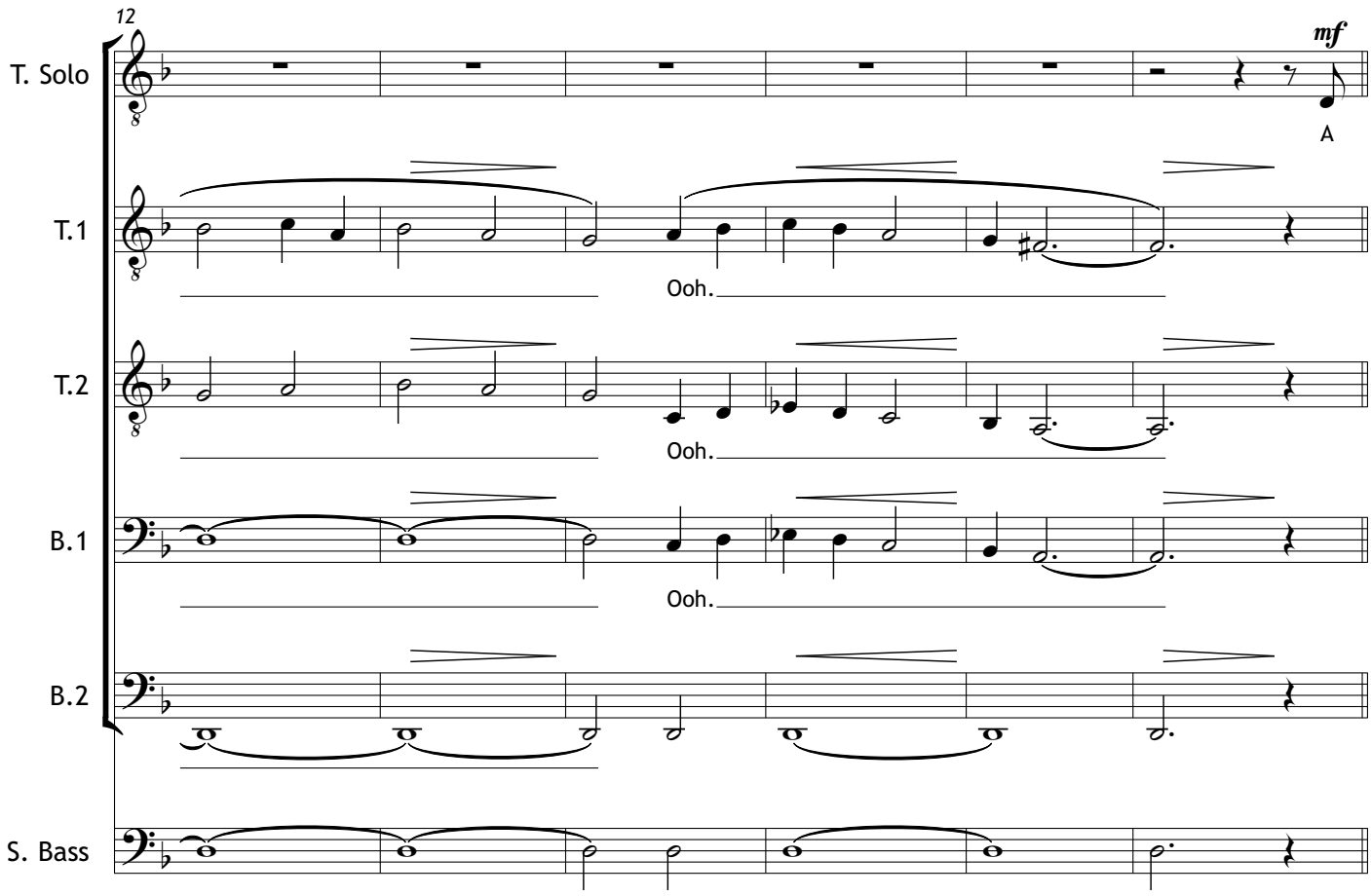
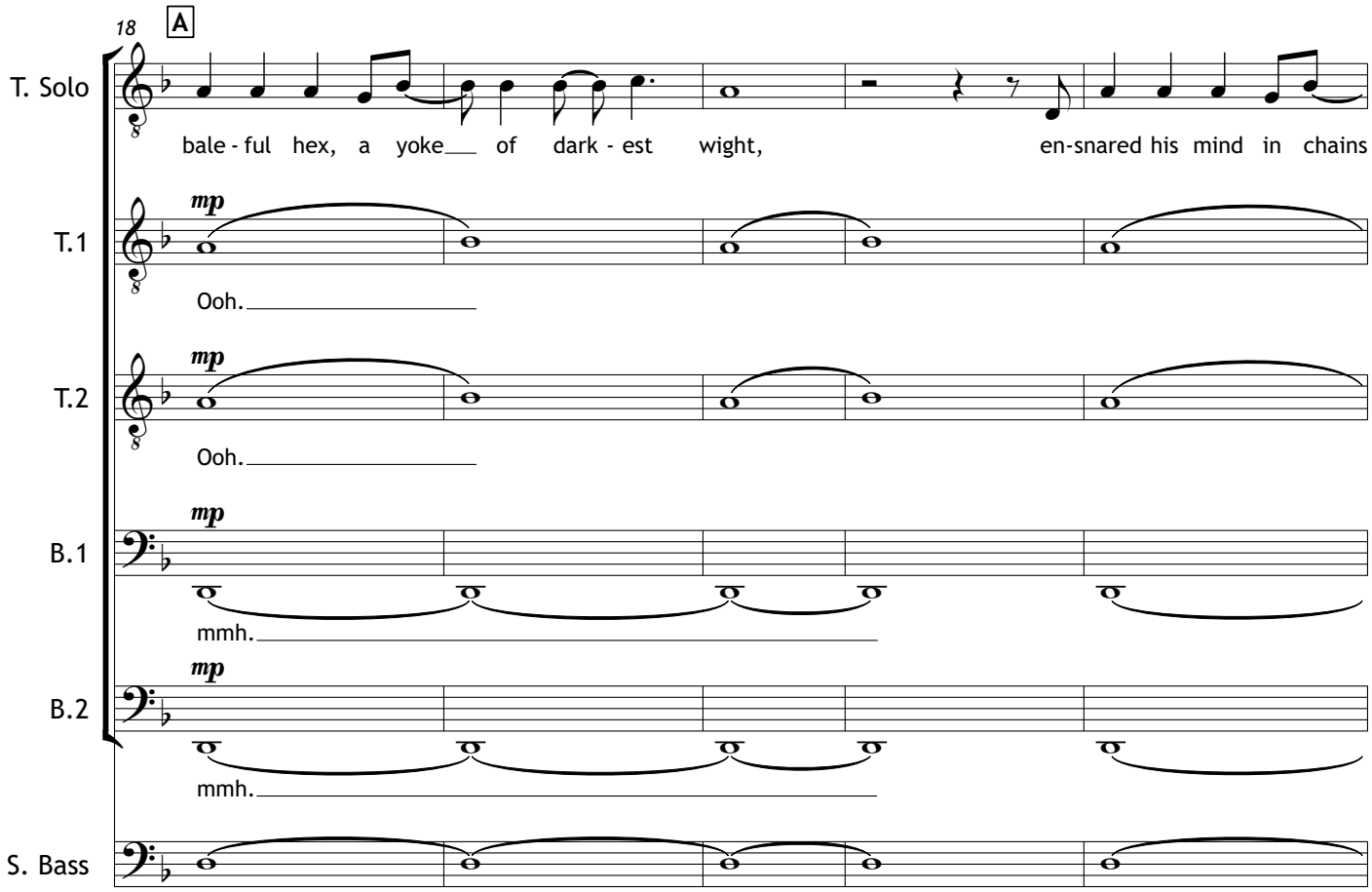
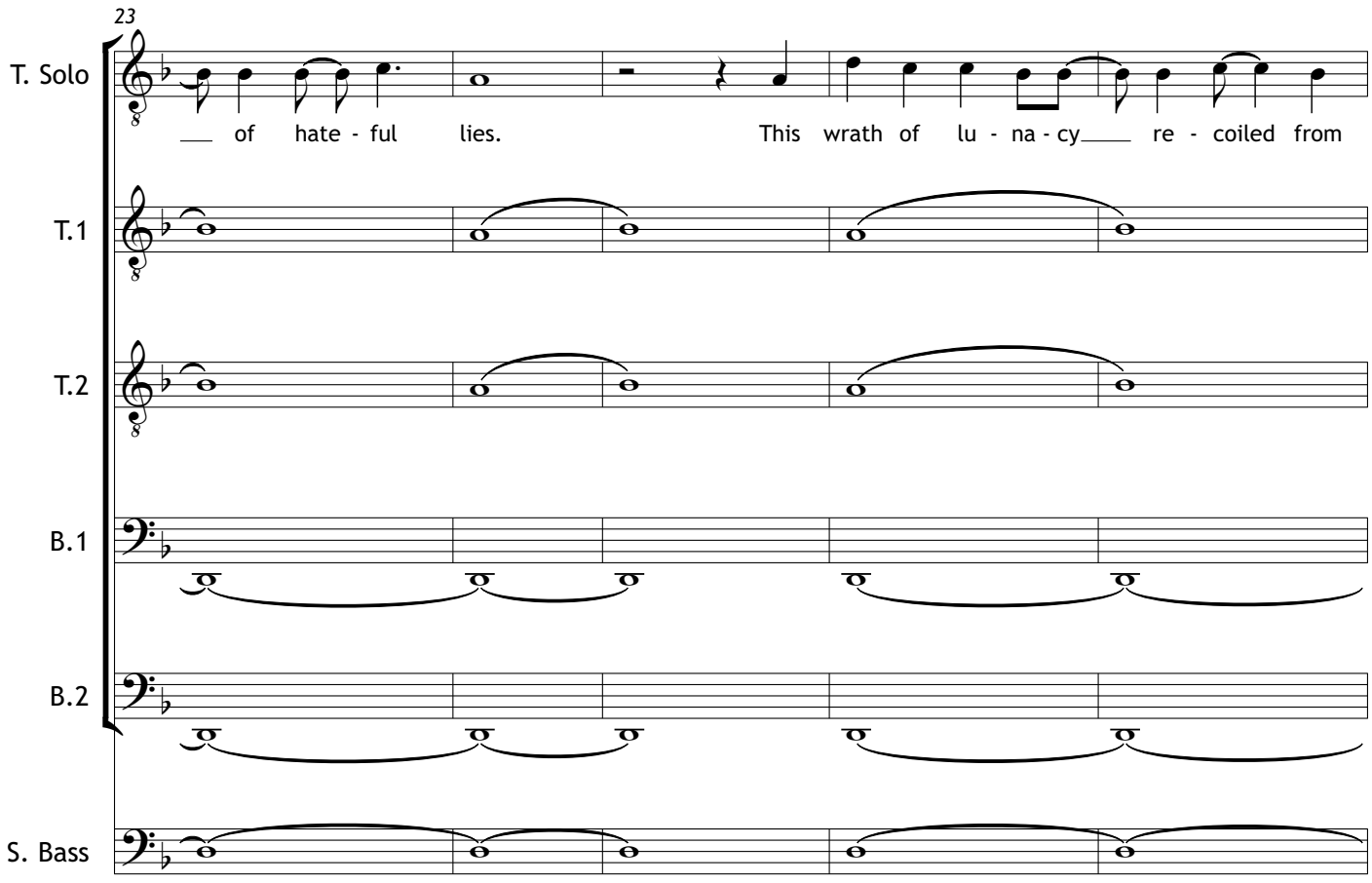

7
T. Solo
T.1
Ooh.
Ooh.
T.2
Ooh.
Ooh.
B.1
mmh.
Ooh.
B.2
mmh.
Ooh.
S. Bass


12
T. Solo
mf
A
T.1
Ooh.
T.2
Ooh.
B.1
Ooh.
B.2
S. Bass





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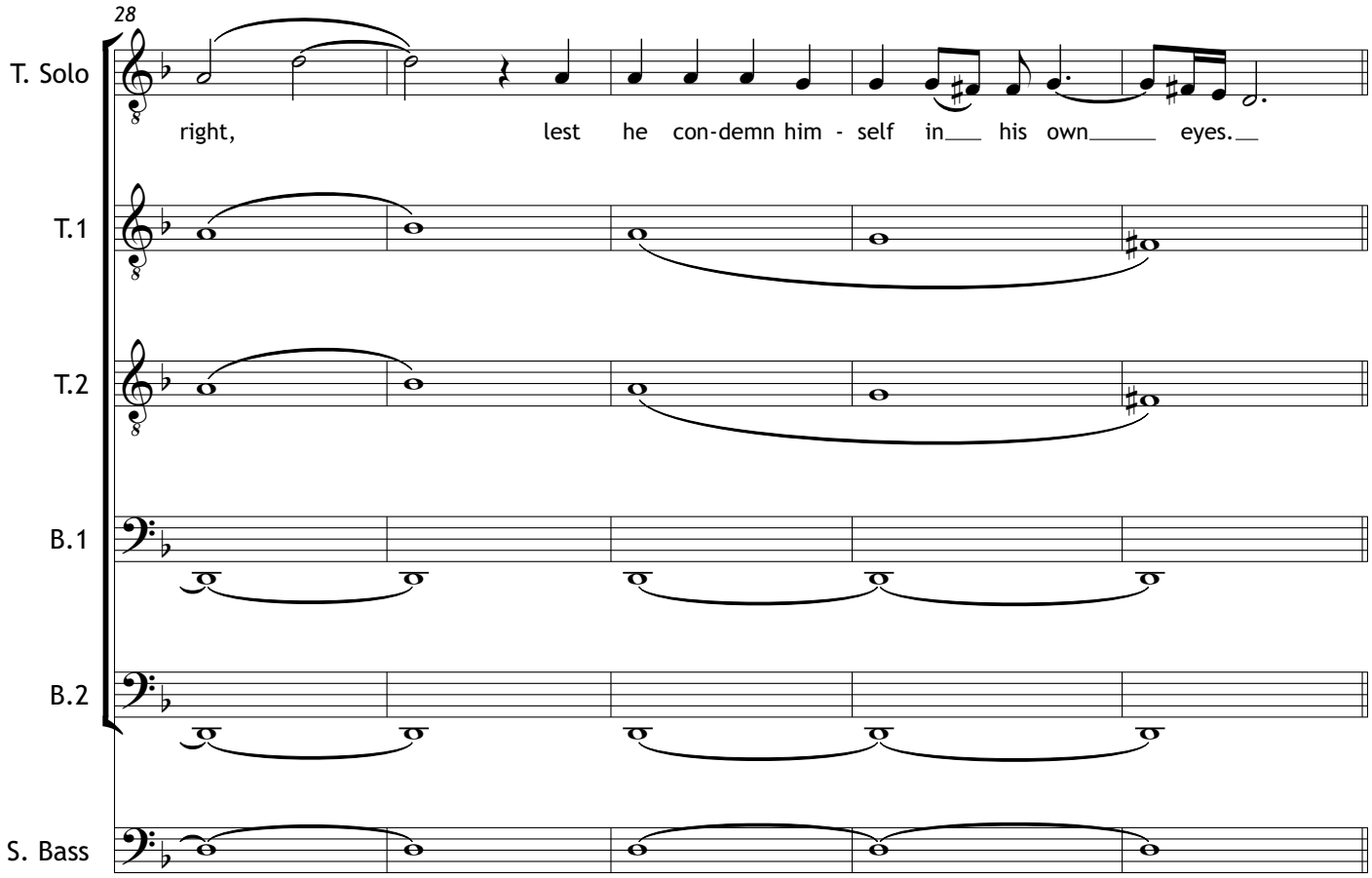

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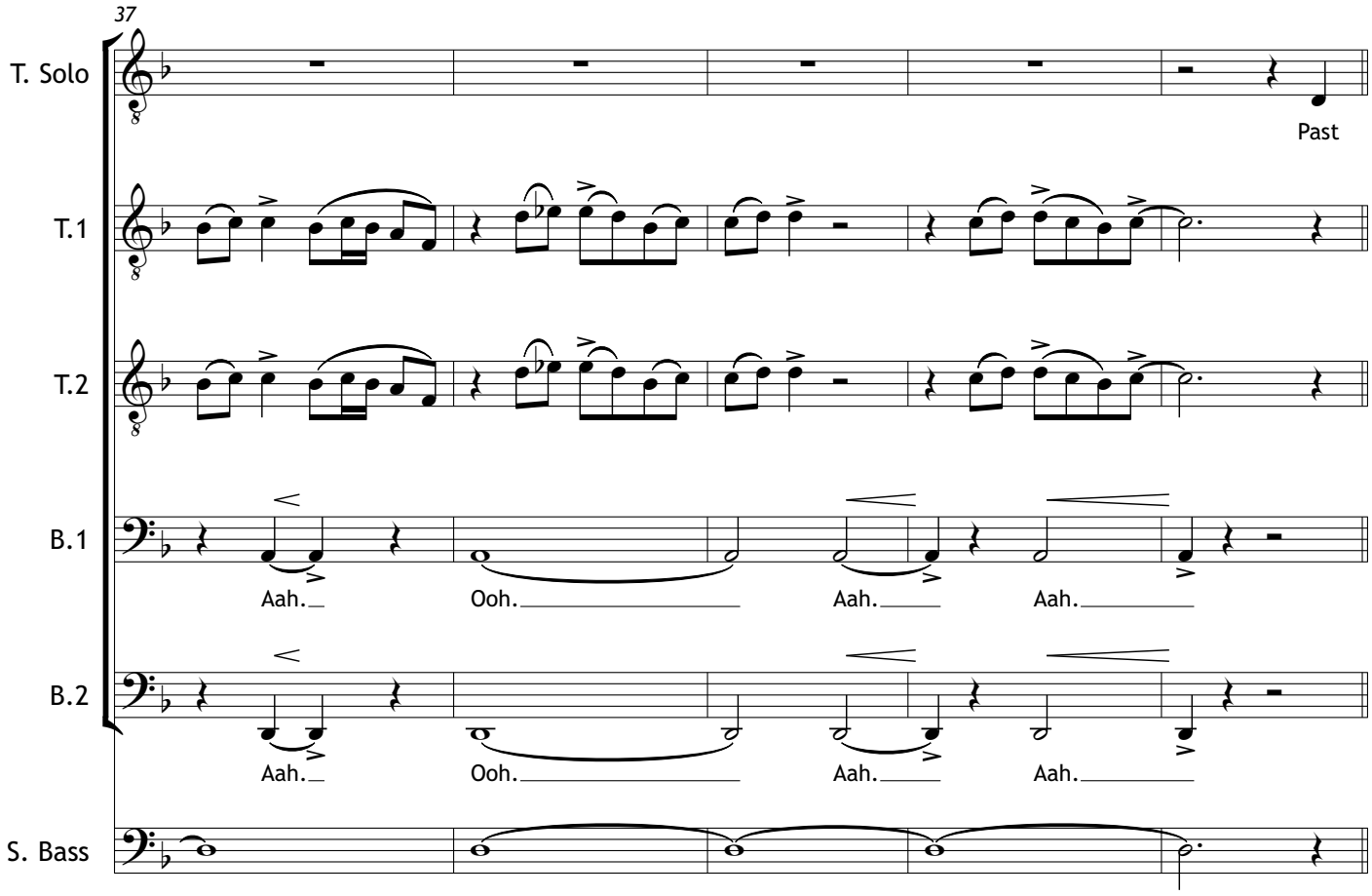

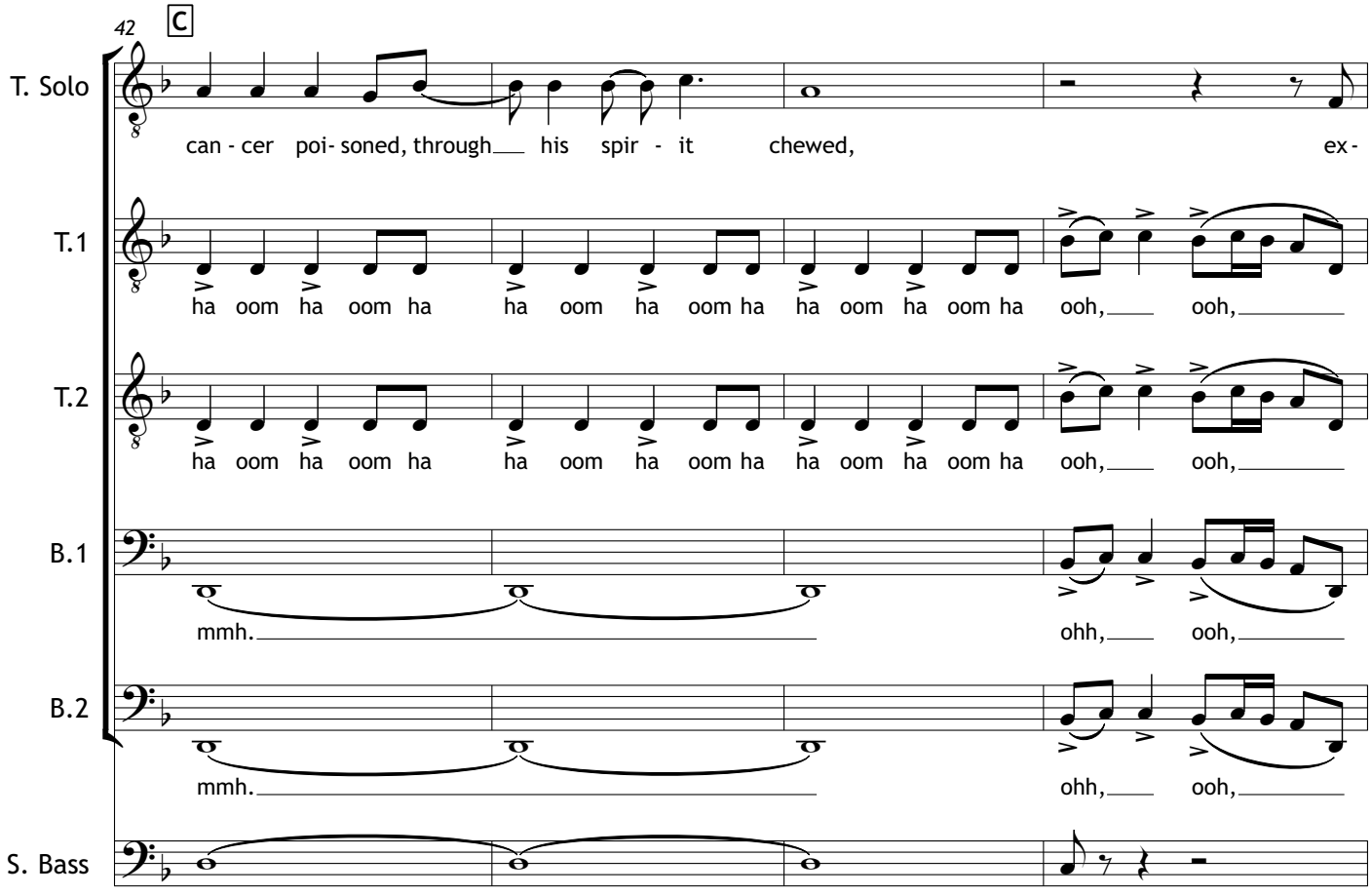

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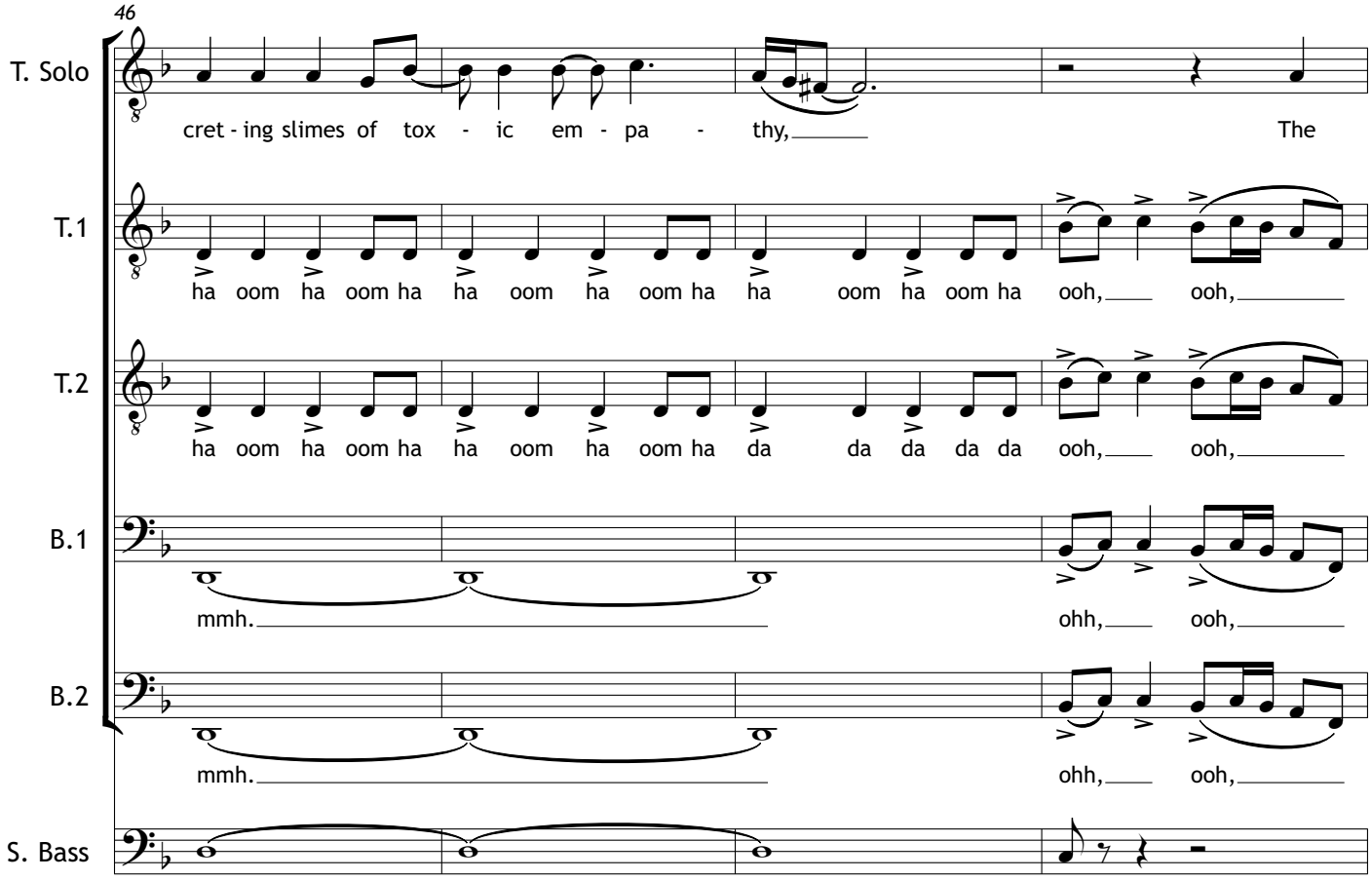

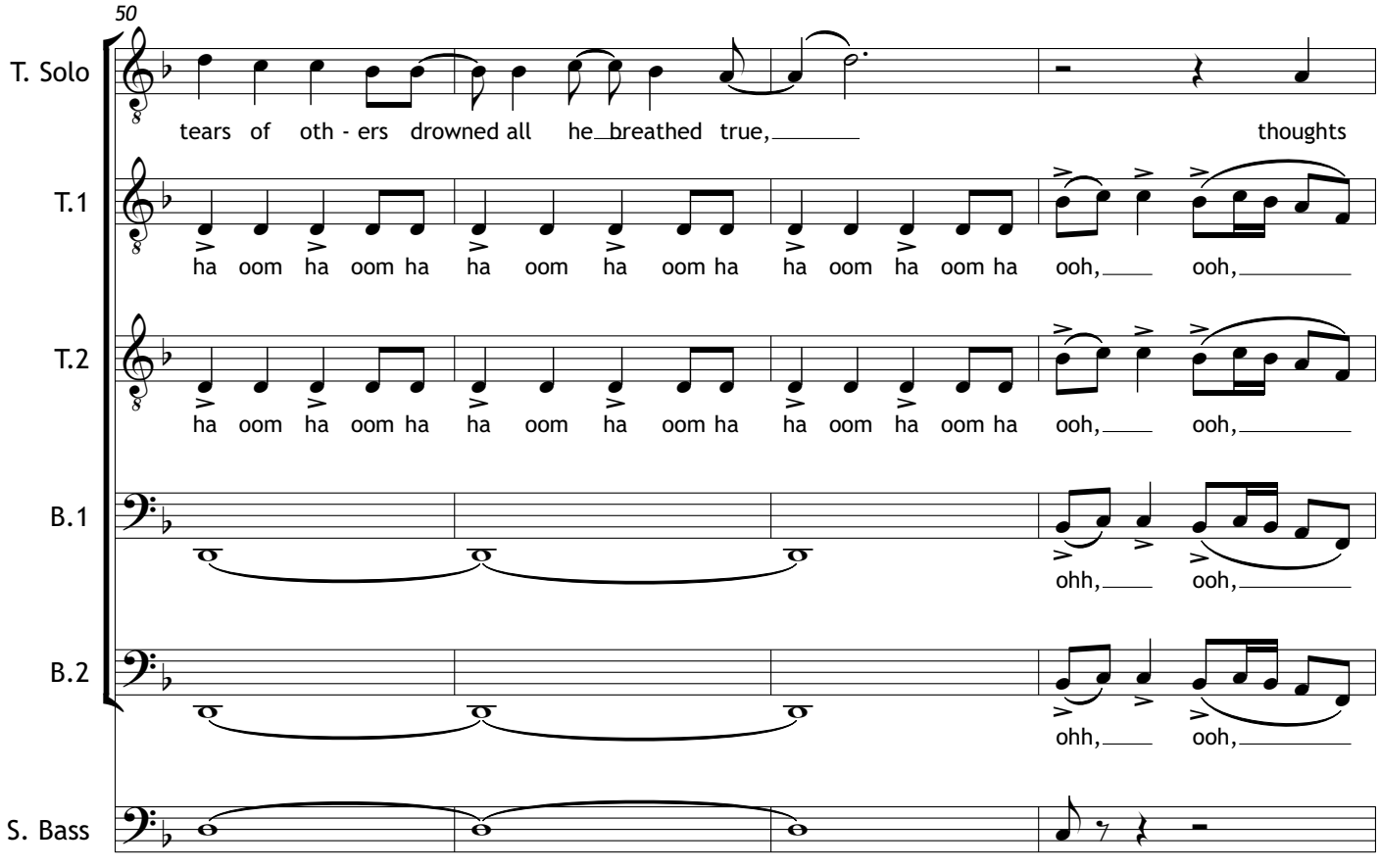

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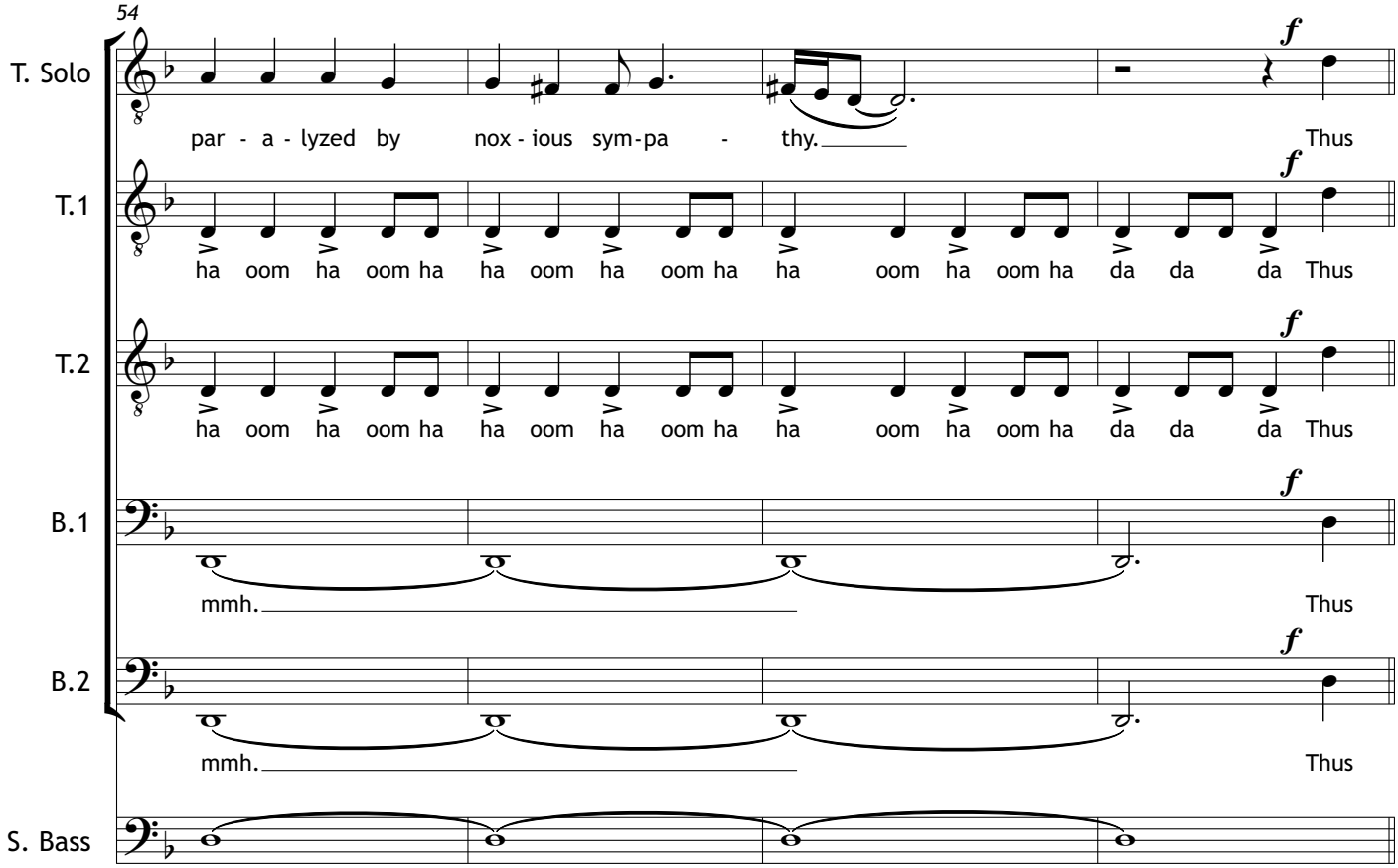

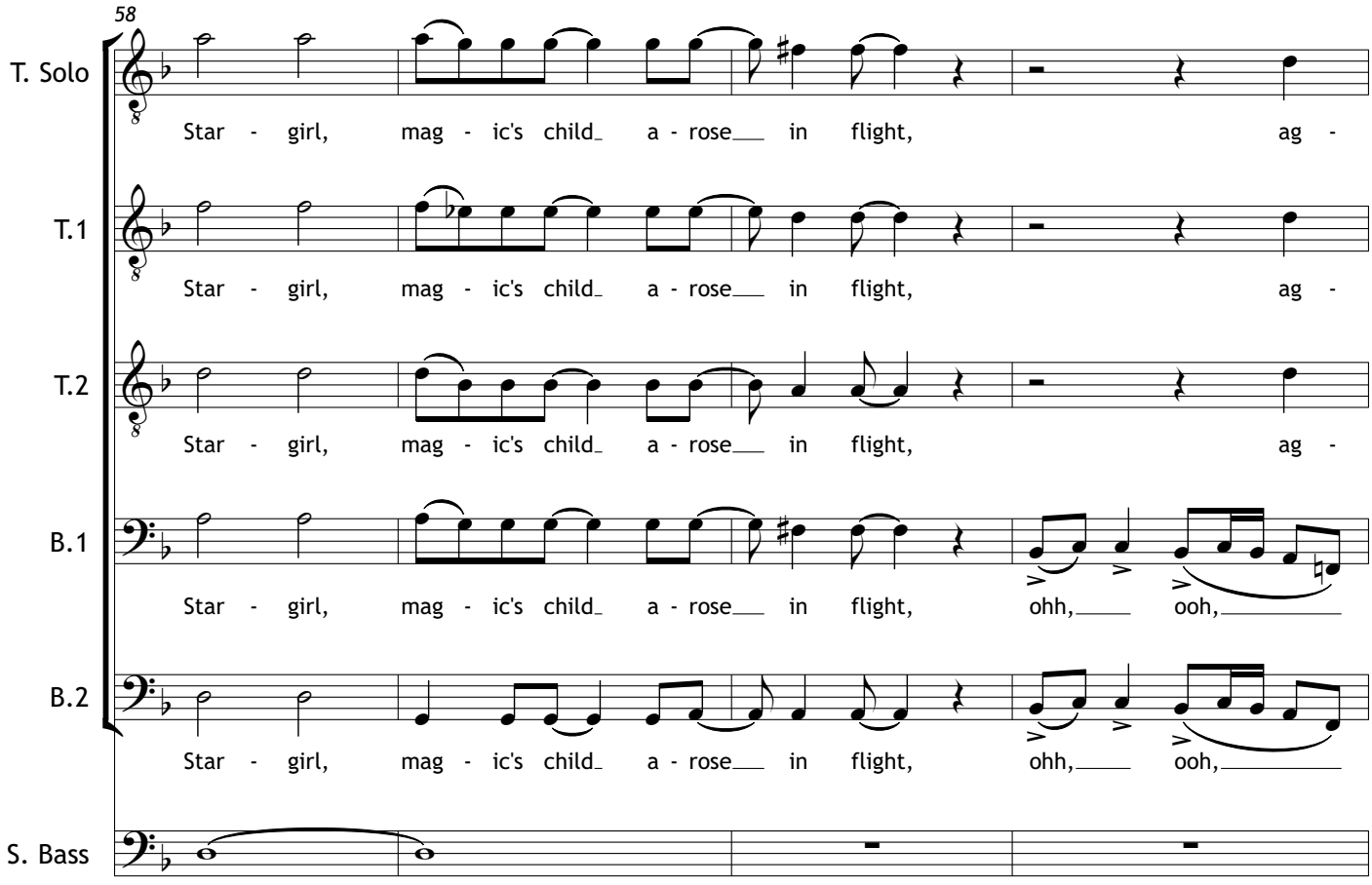

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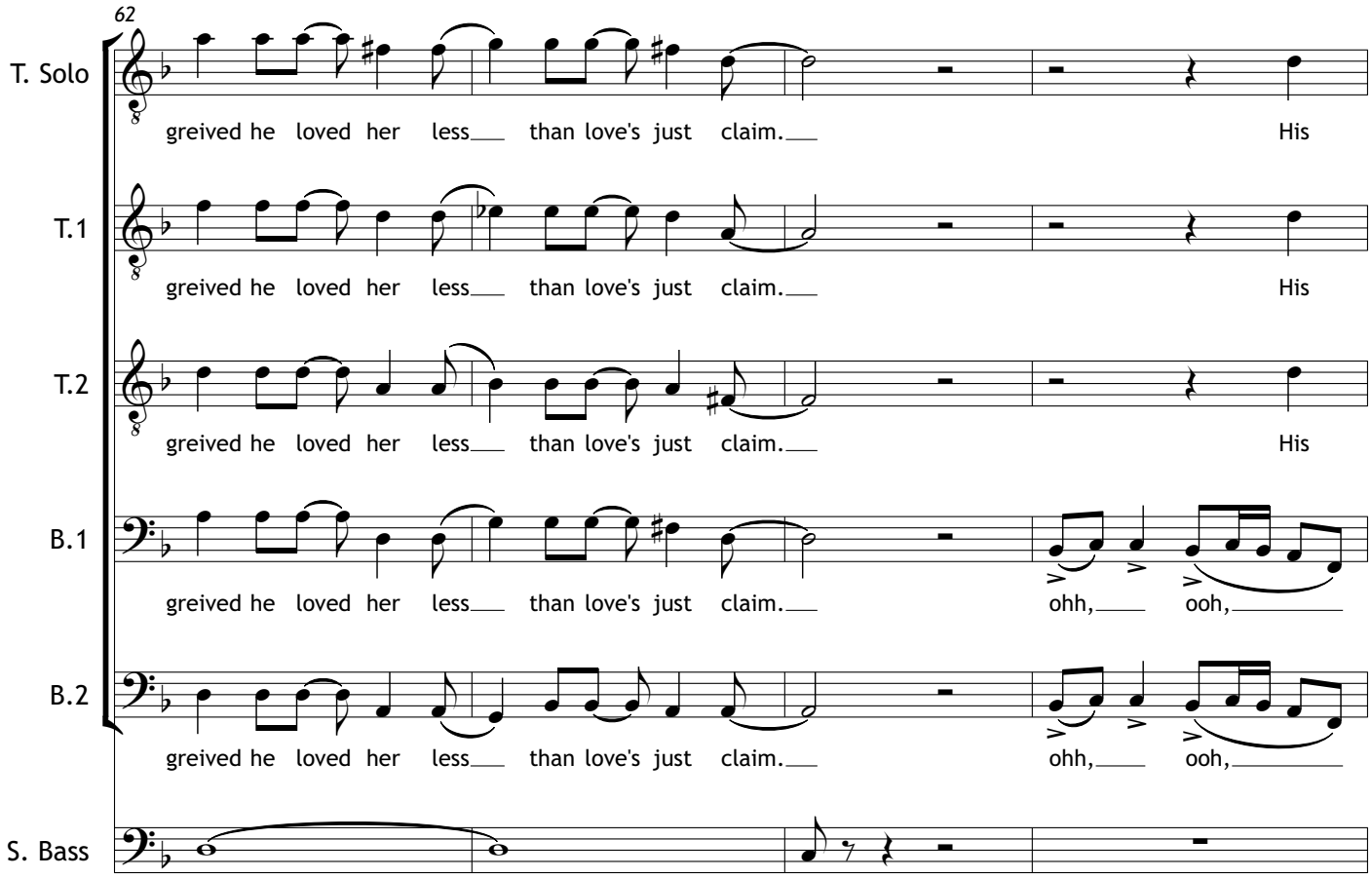

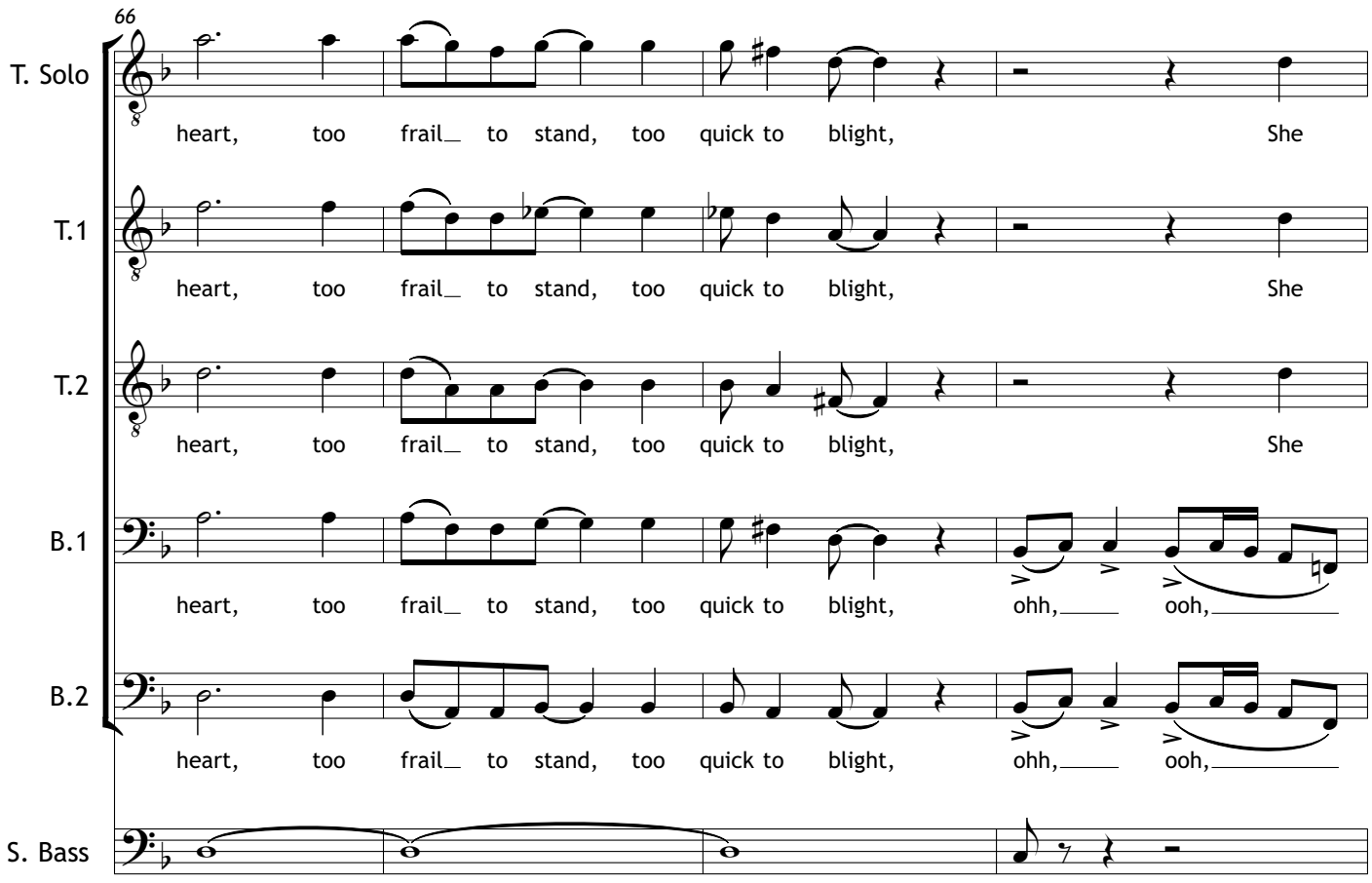

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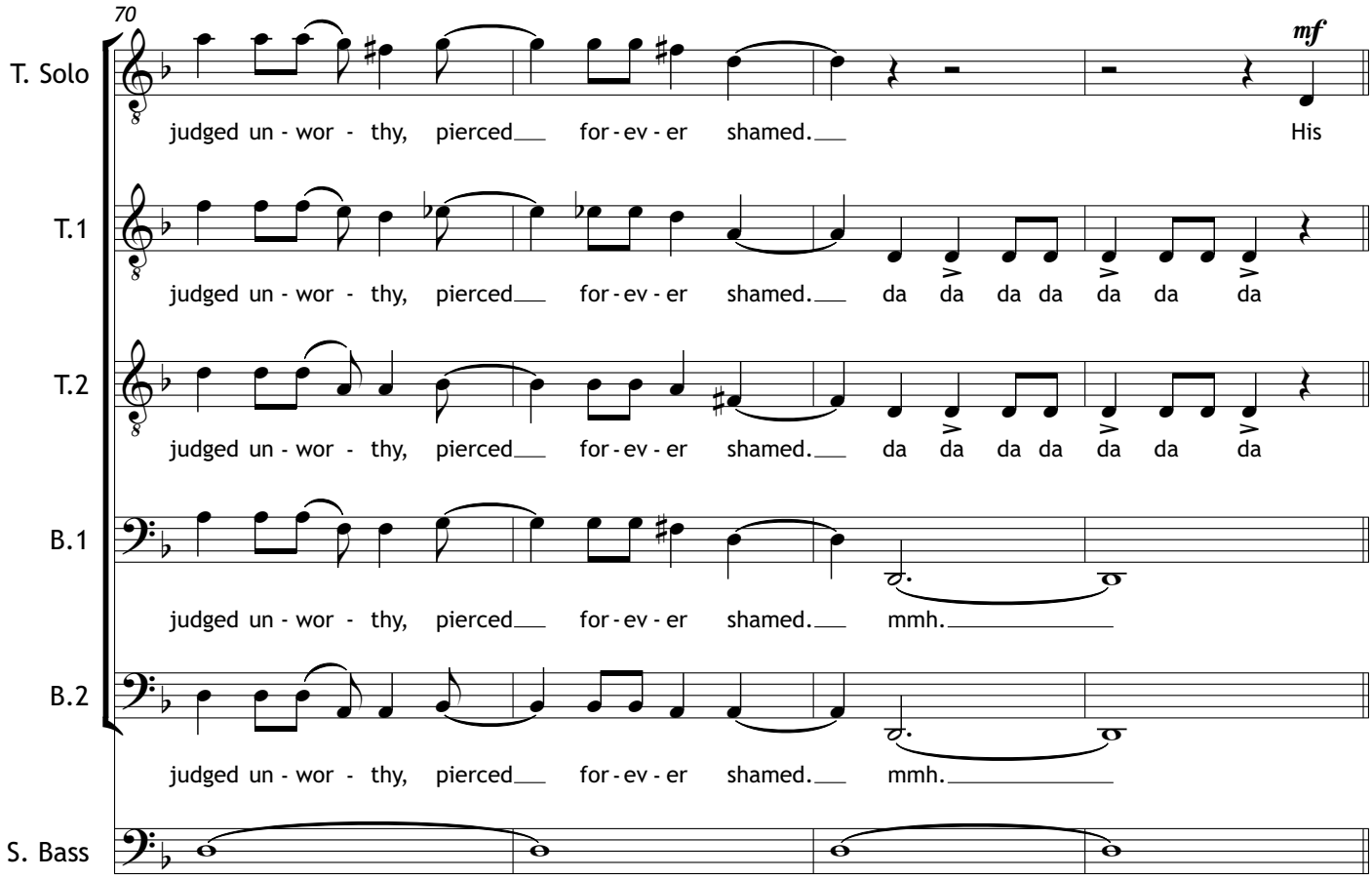

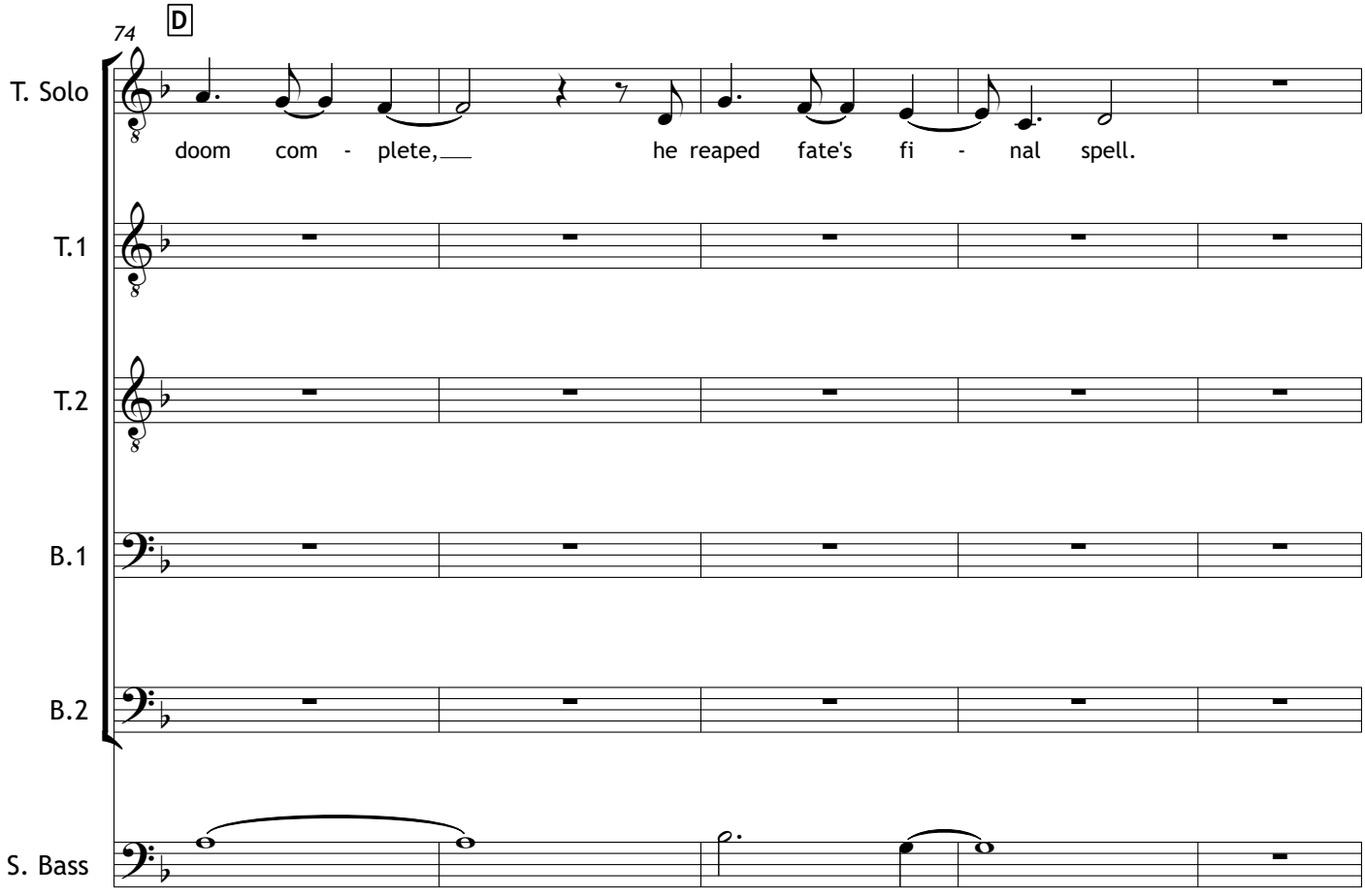

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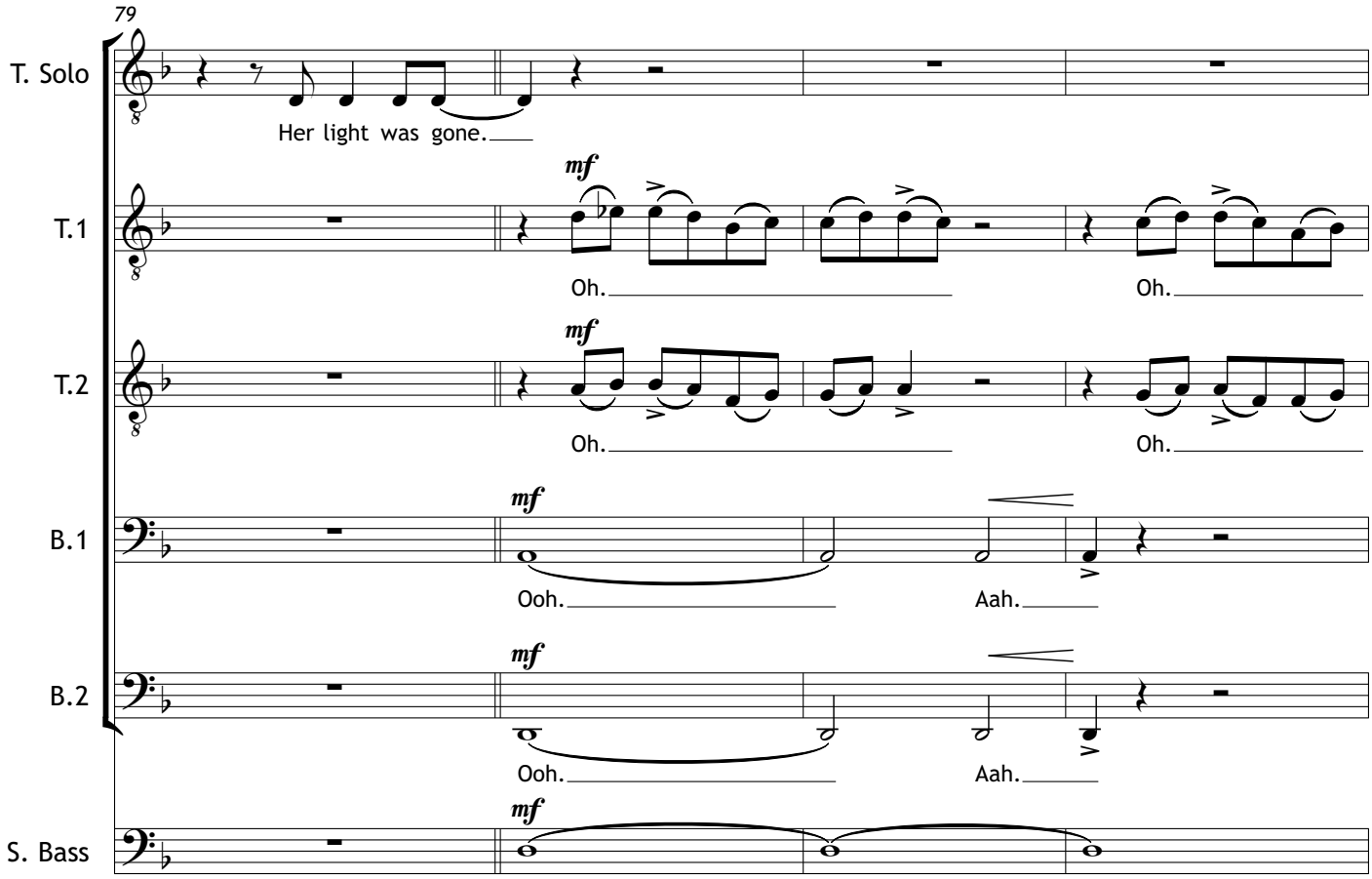

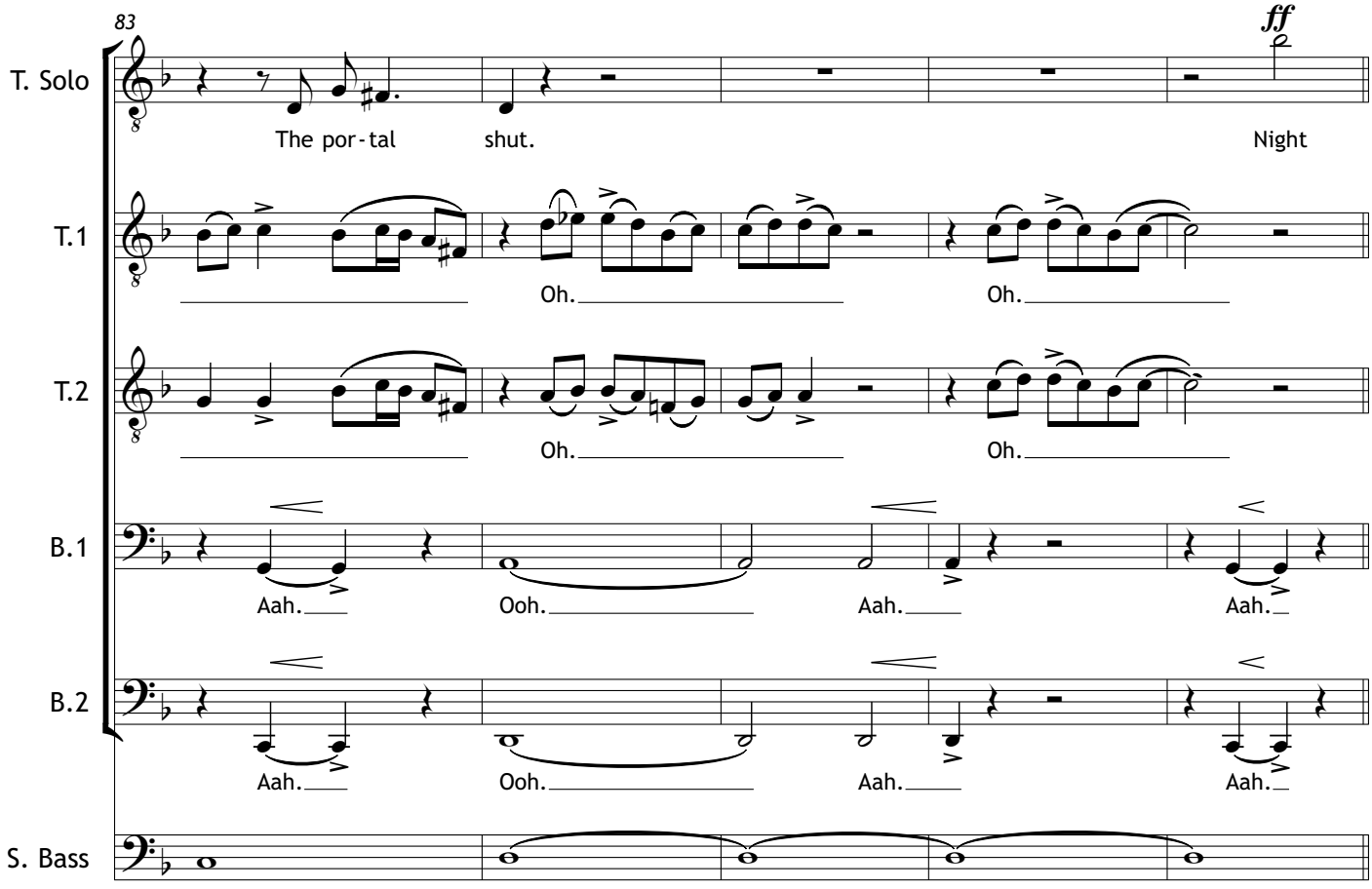

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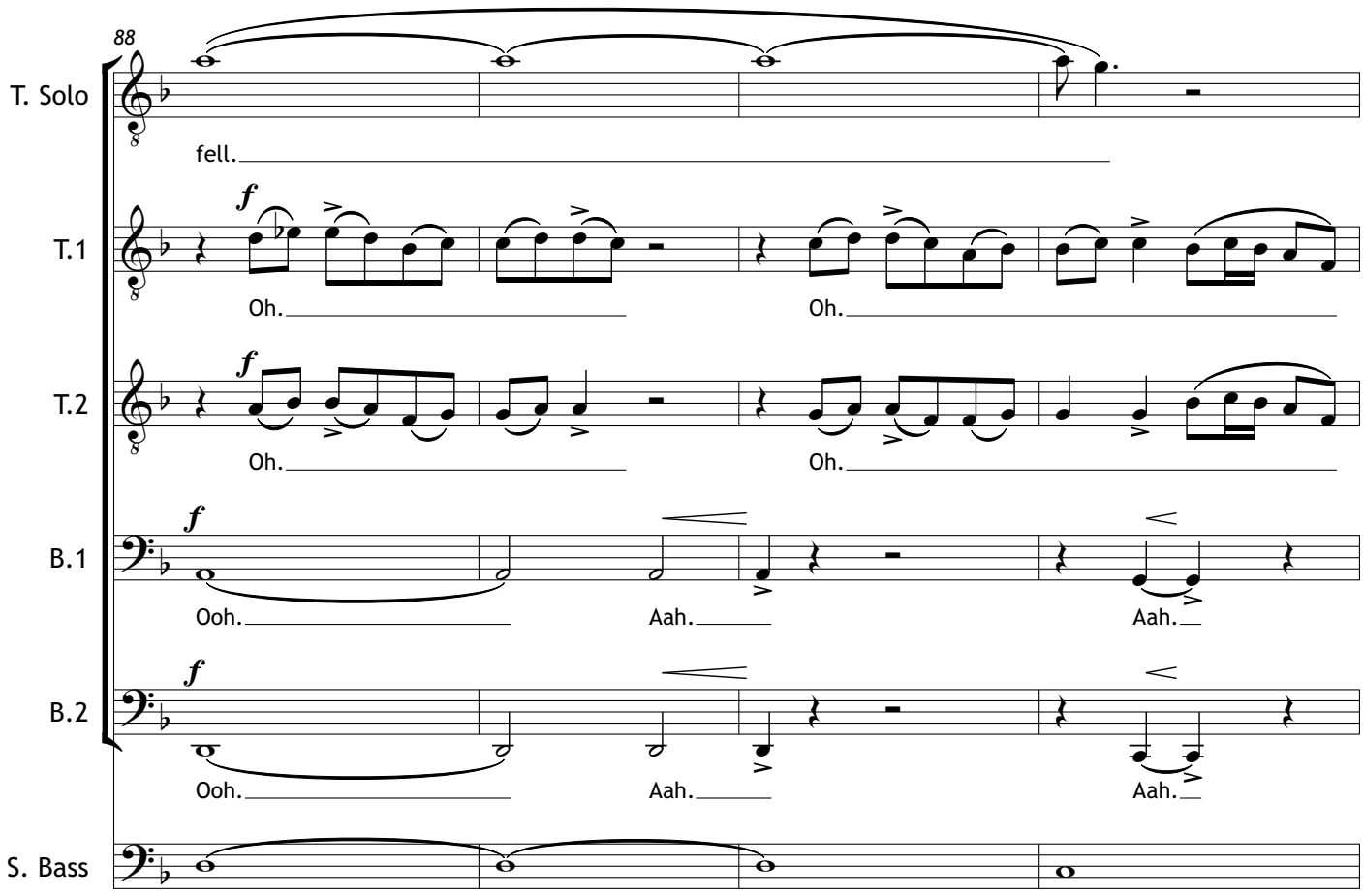

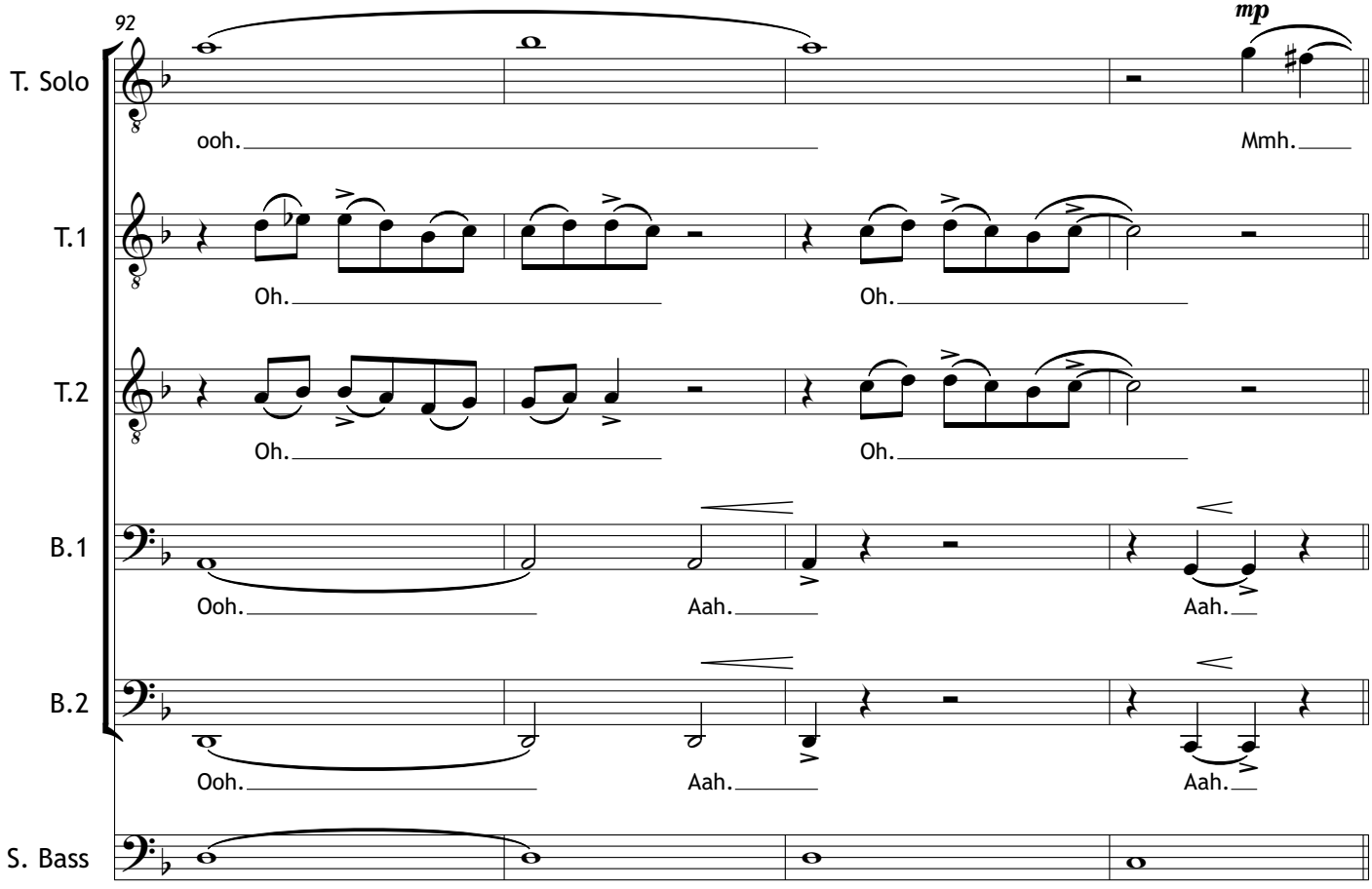

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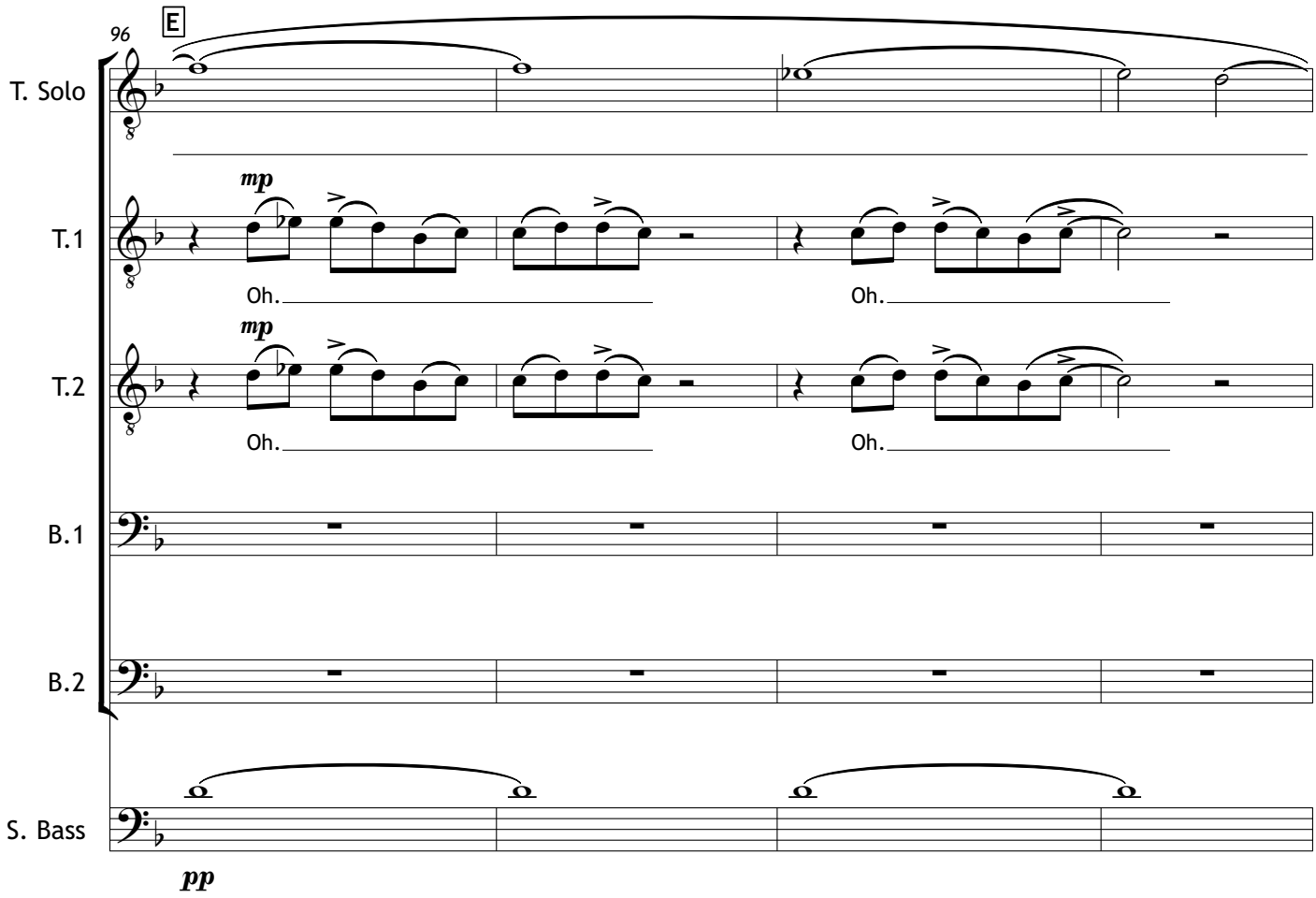

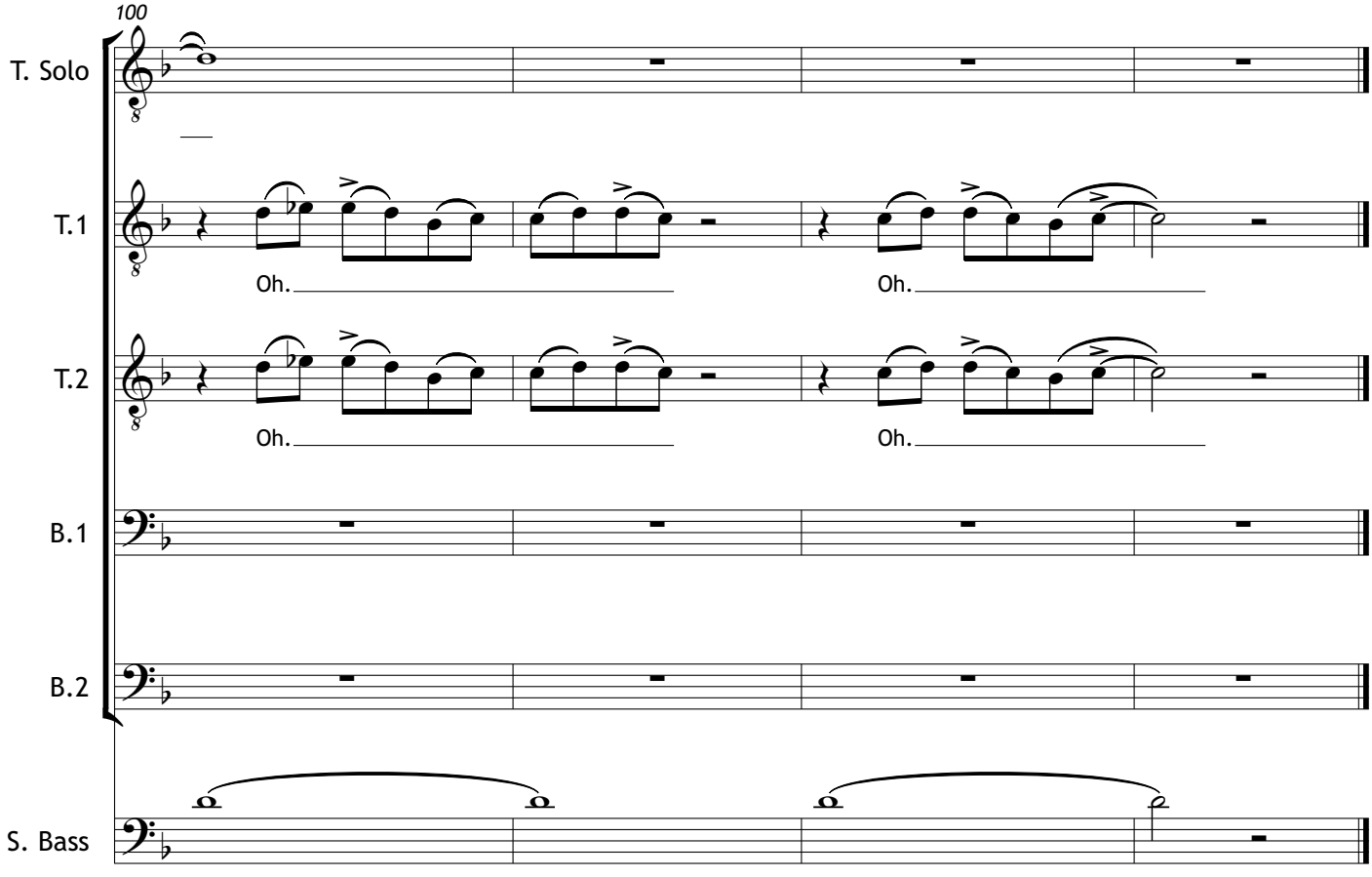

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10. Metamorphosis

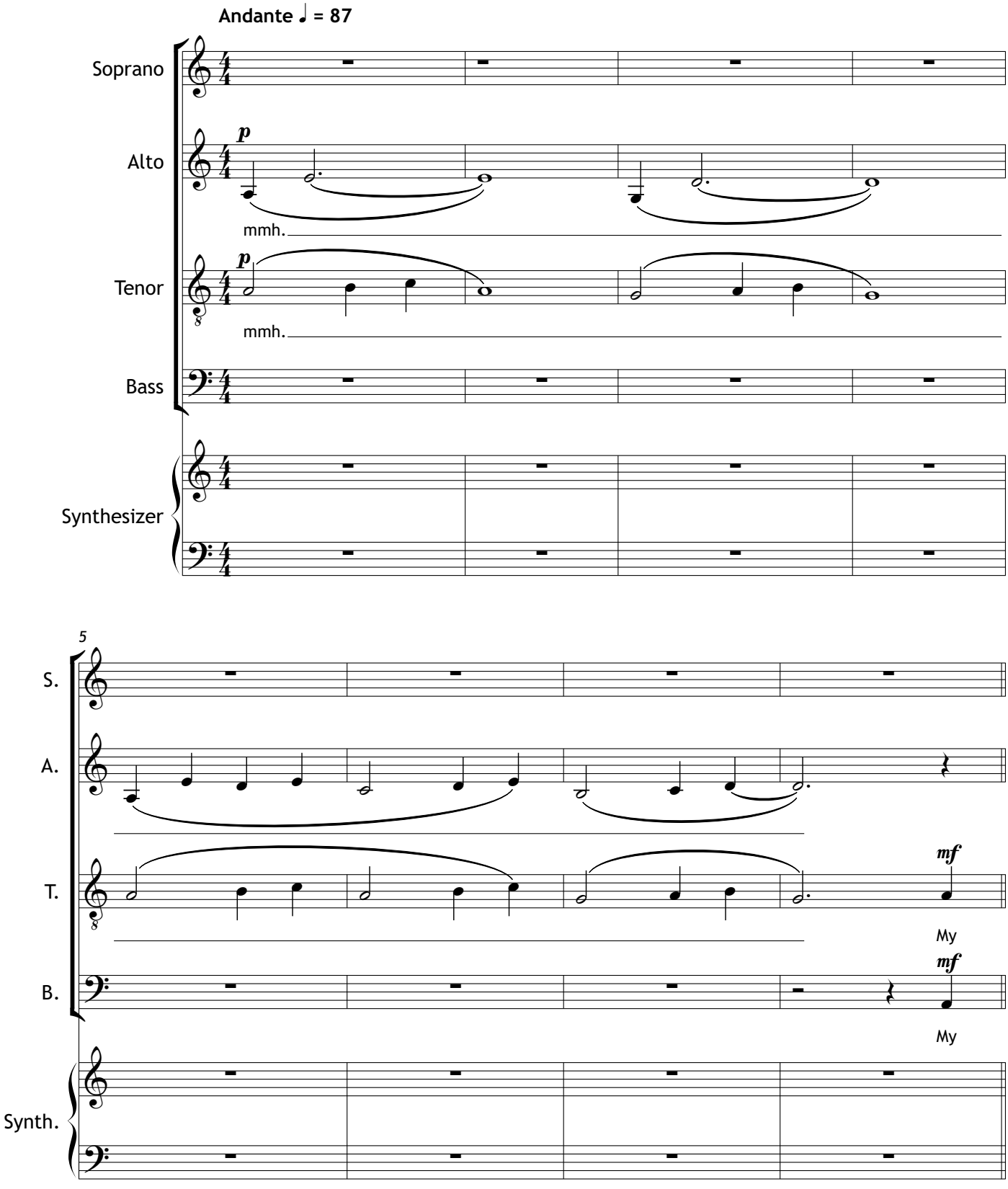
This sonnet is a lyrical adaptation of a message from the beloved written in an email in 2005: *Metamorphosis* juxtaposes this early message of faith and intimacy with the collapse of trust that led to mutual estrangement. The three quatrains are based on the beloved's words (turned into rhyme with meter with some poetic license), whereas the final couplet is in the voice of the poet. The song at its core is about stunned bewilderment at an incomprehensible transformation, a fall from grace to vilification and emotional inversion, a baffled defeat the poet would never truly come to terms with or ever understand.

Metamorphosis

Senescence: Item 2 of "Tome of Stars"

Stargazer

Vocal Ensemble



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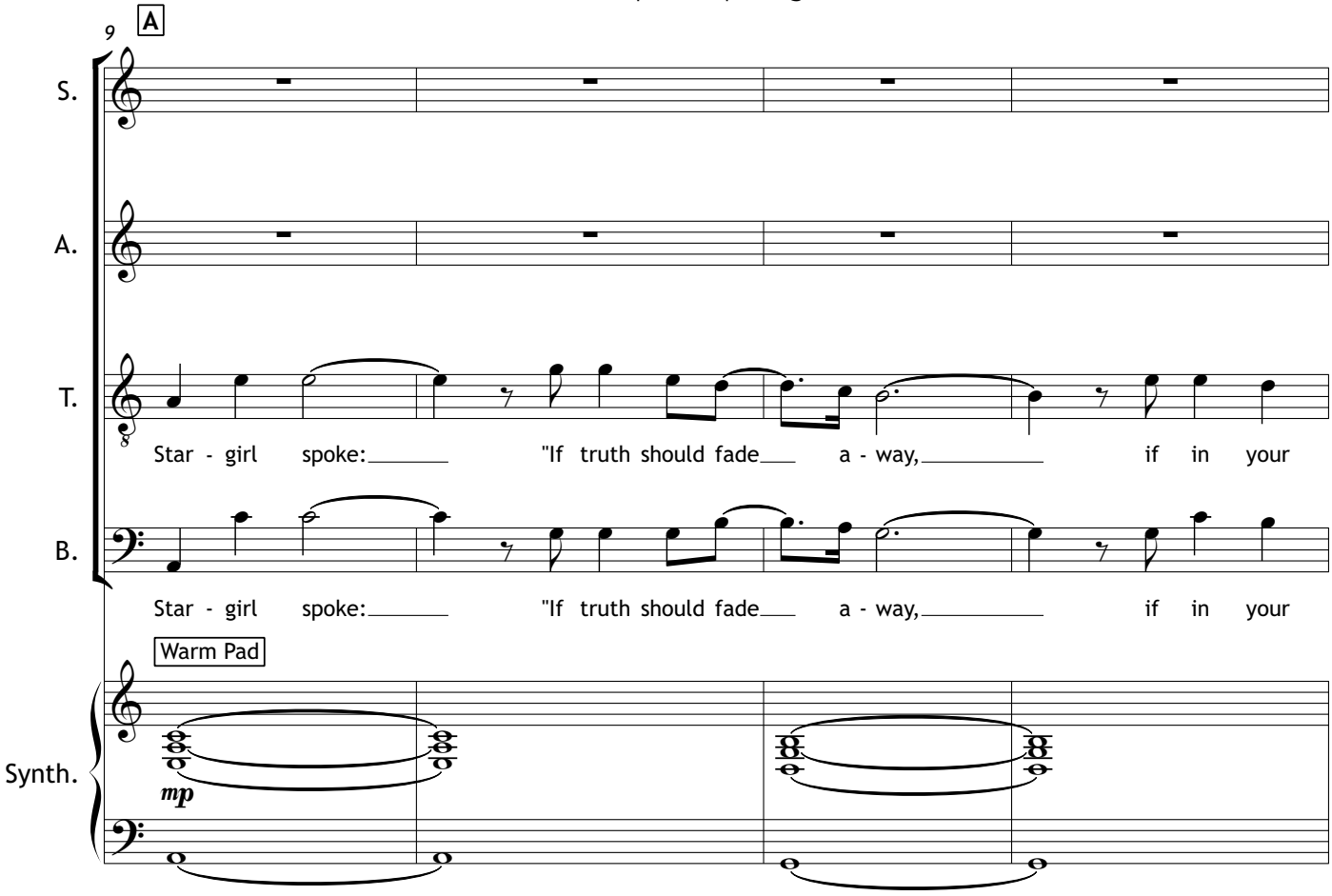

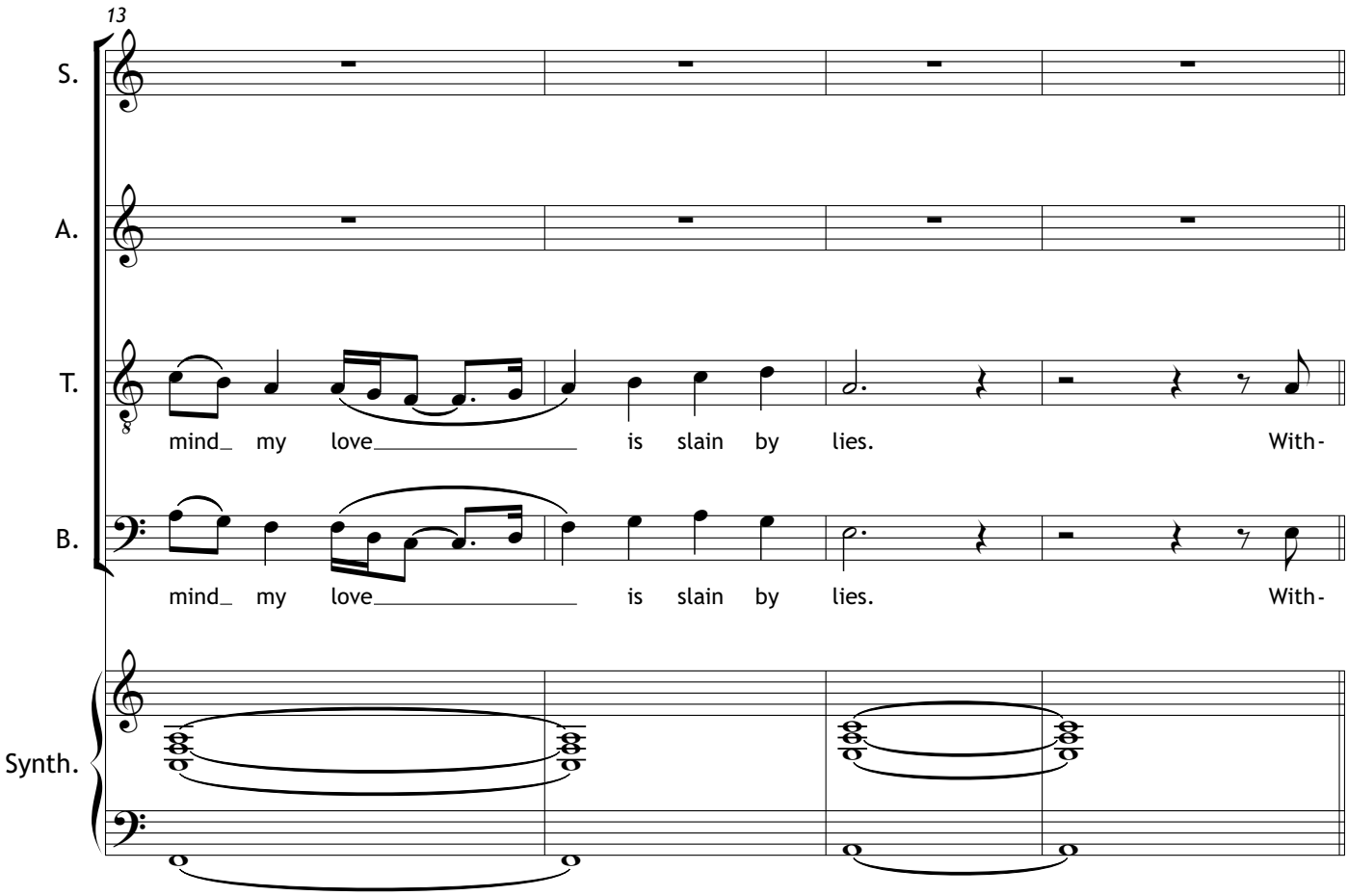

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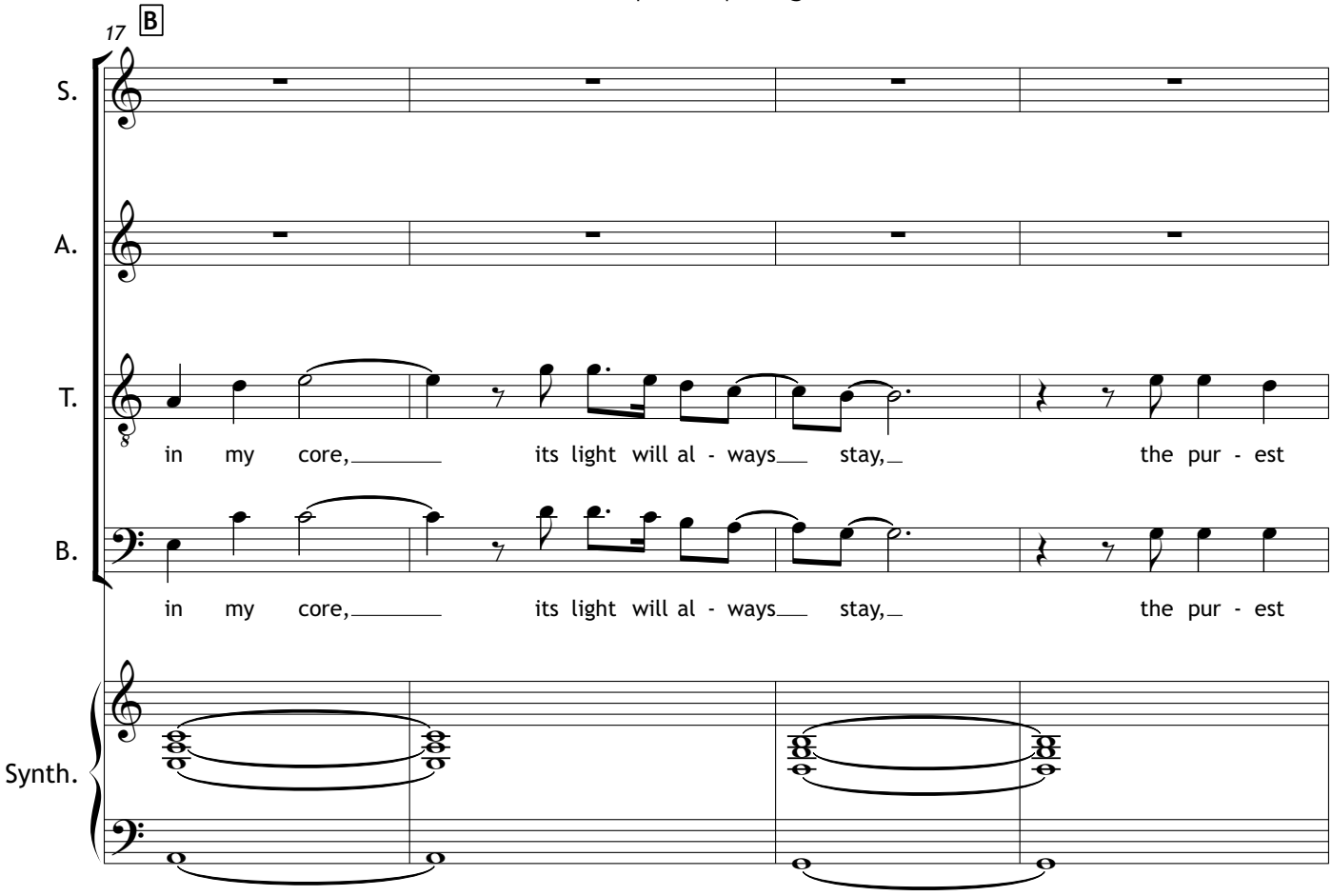

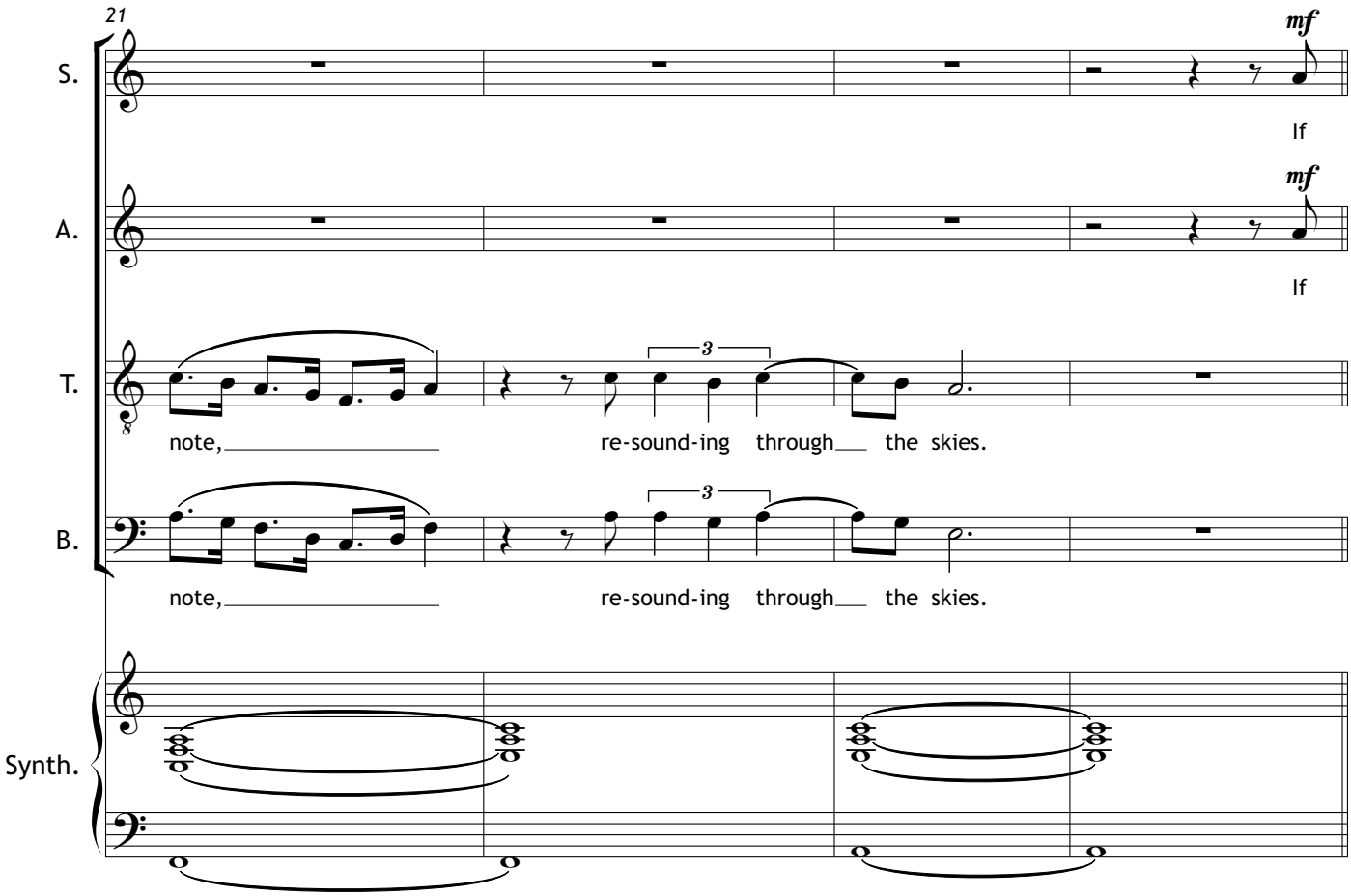

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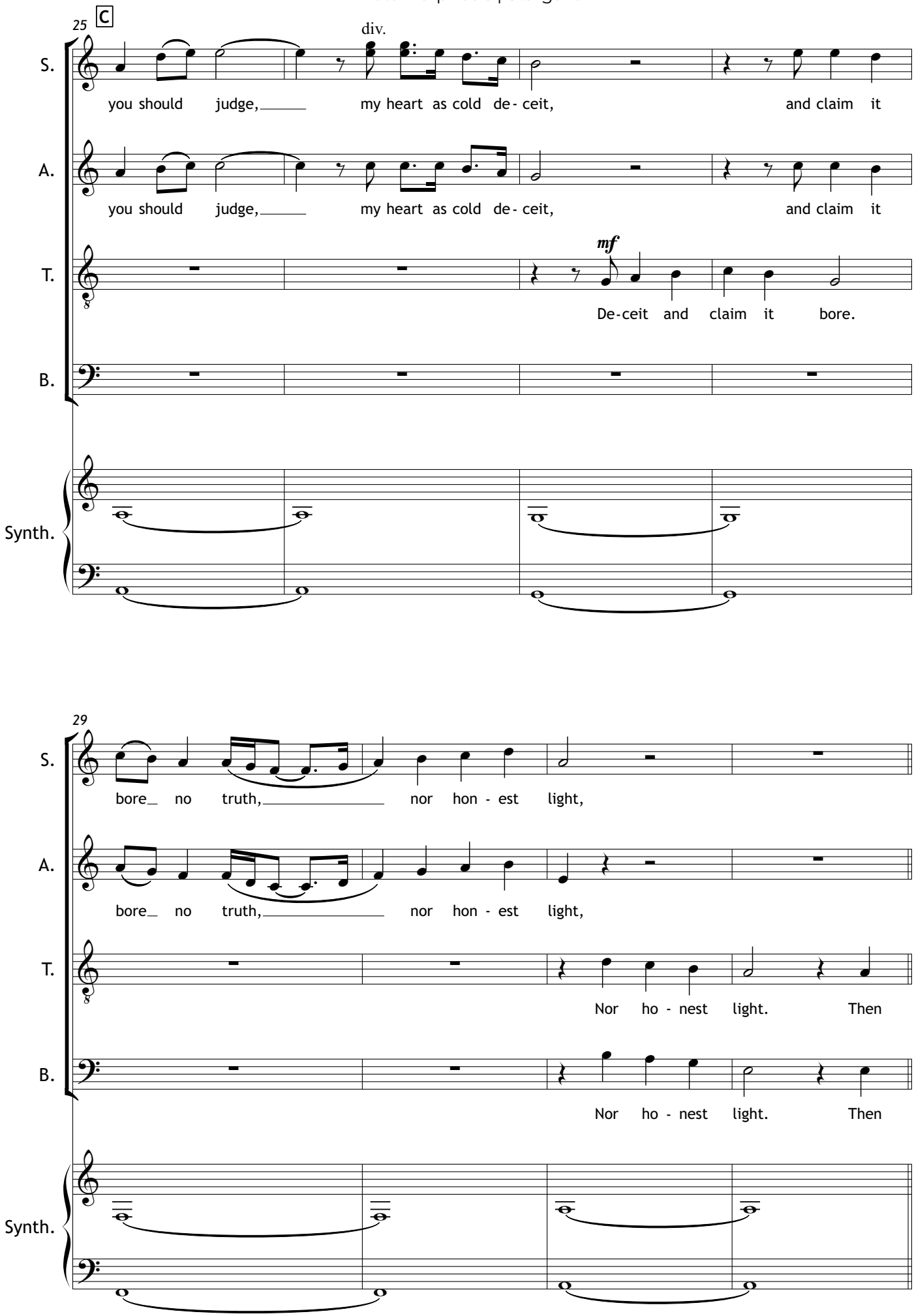

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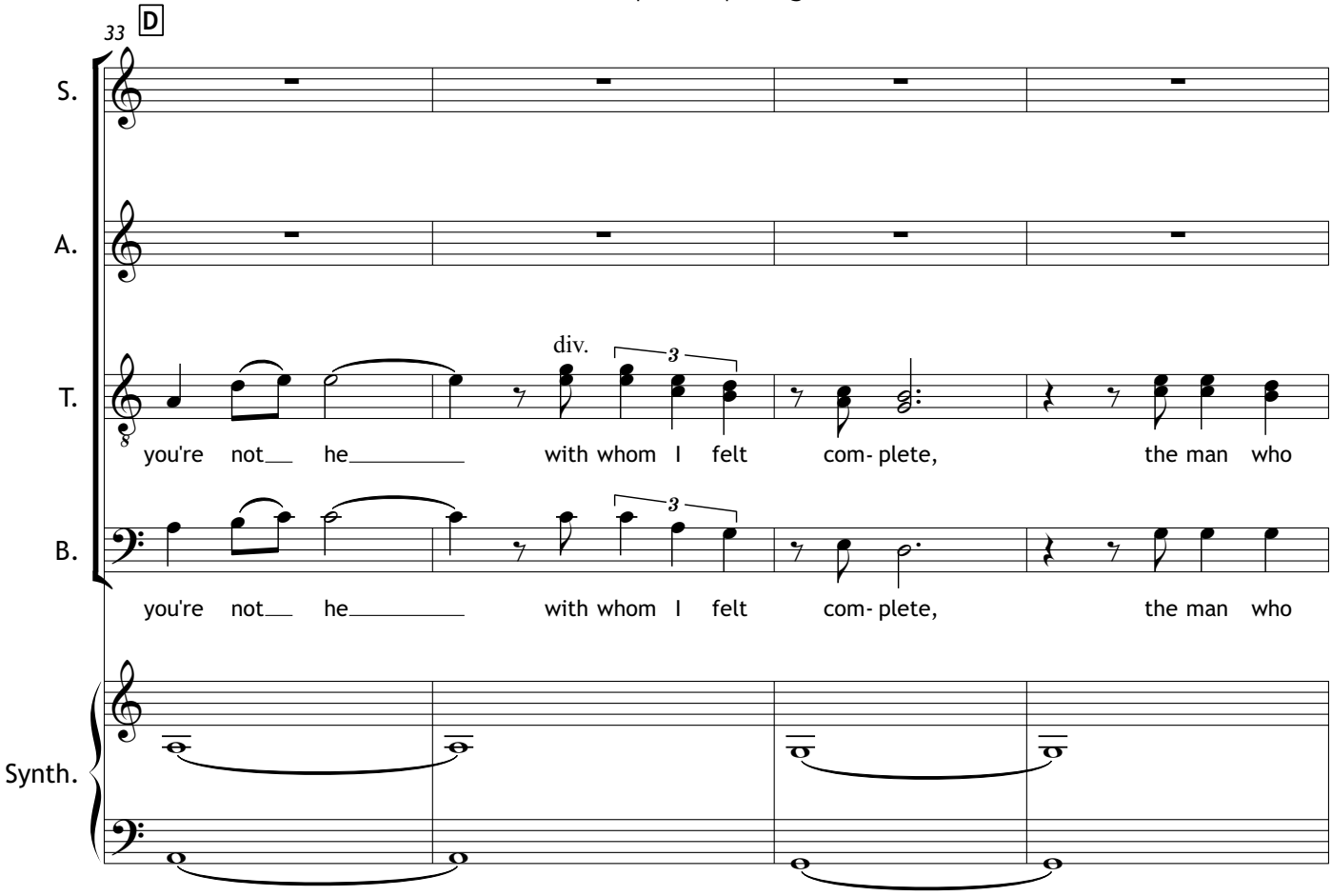

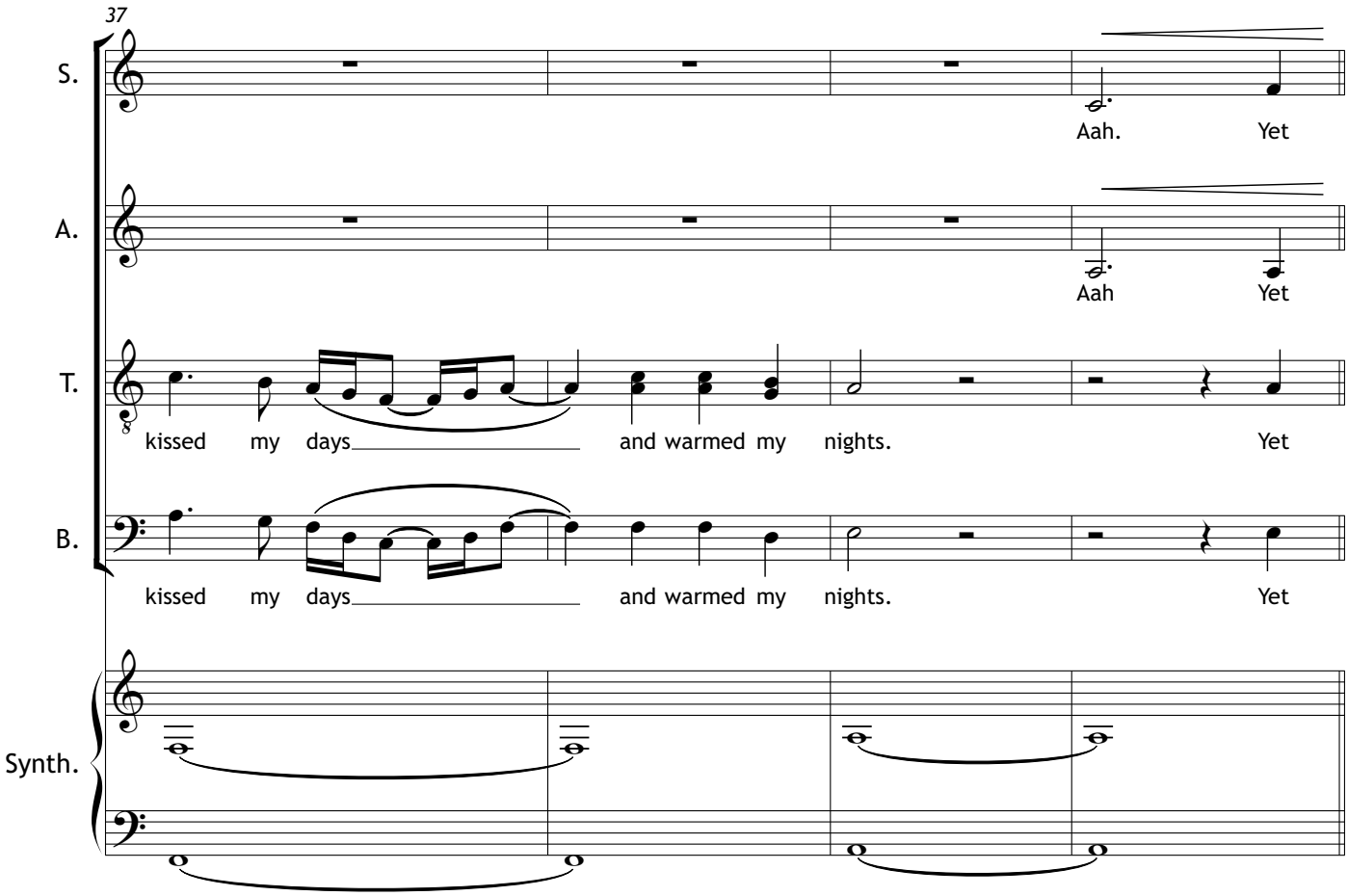

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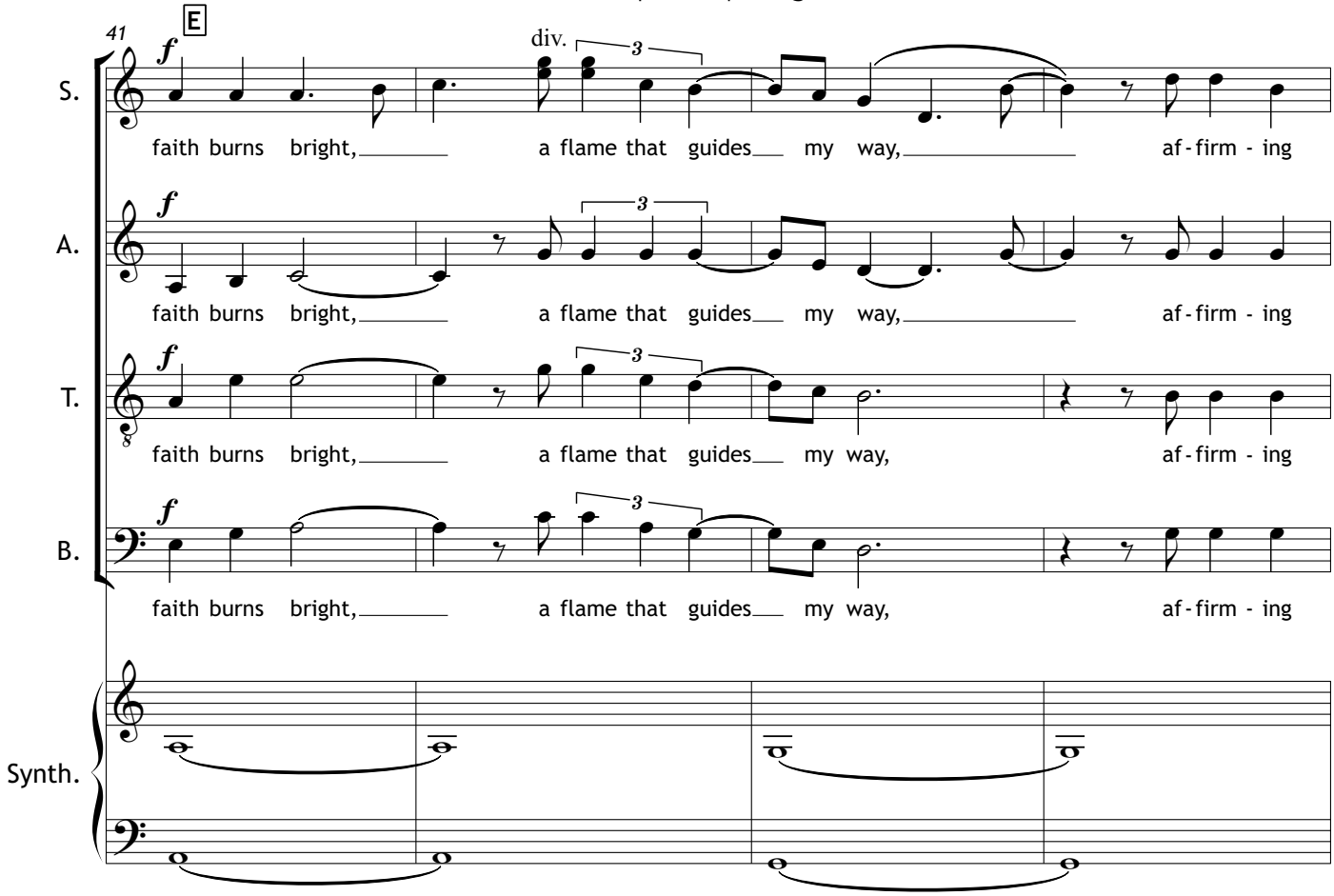

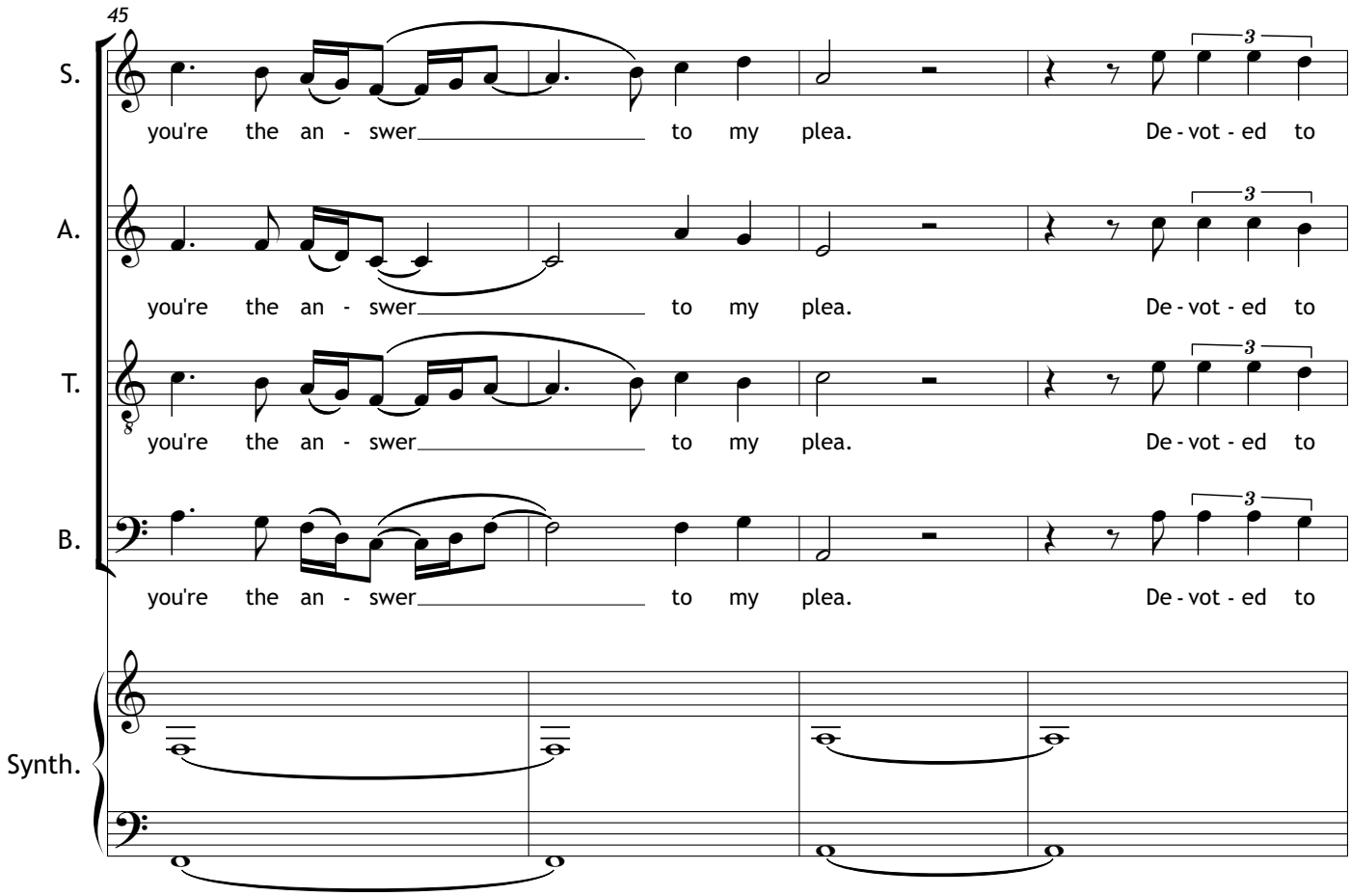

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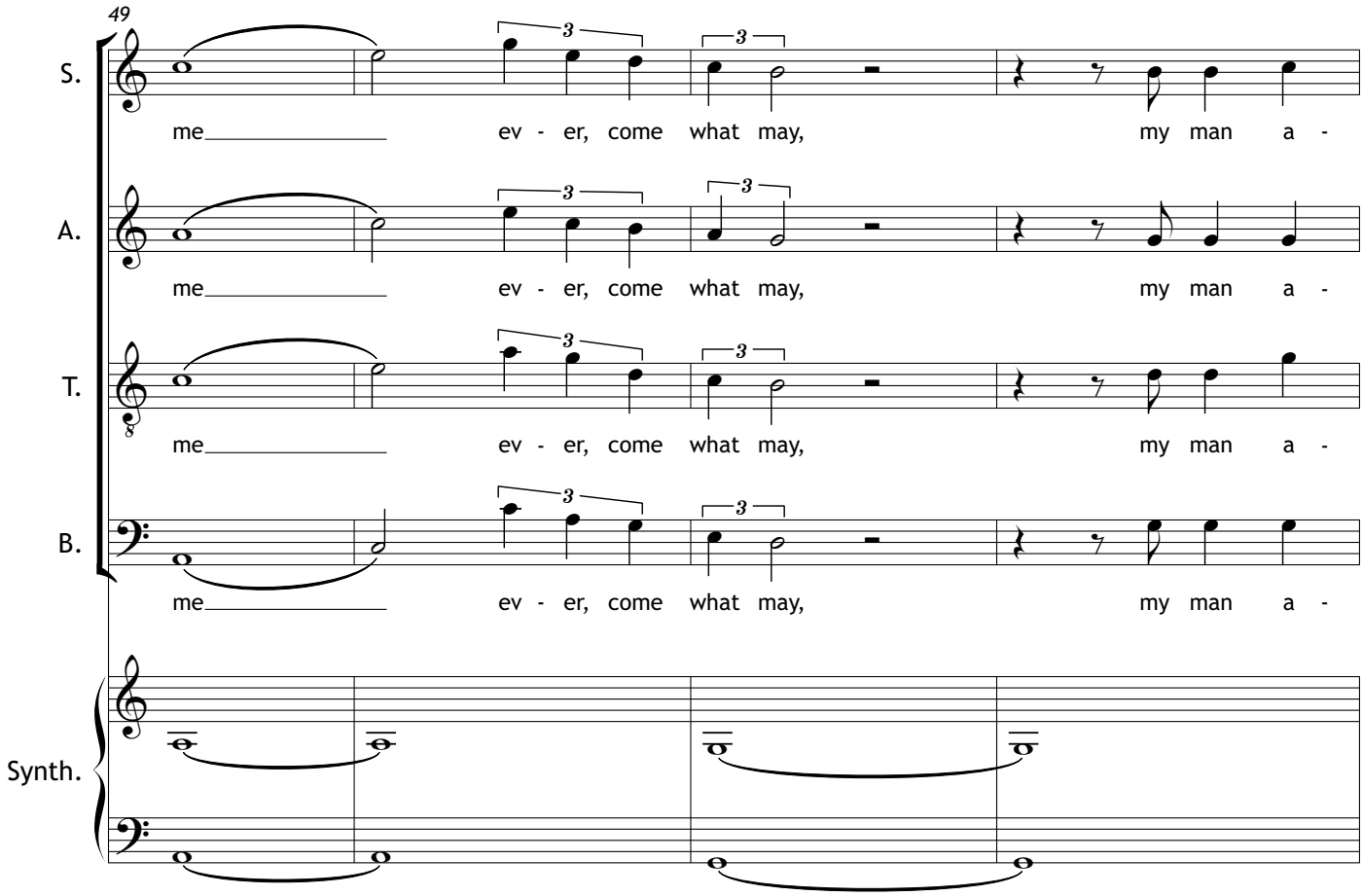

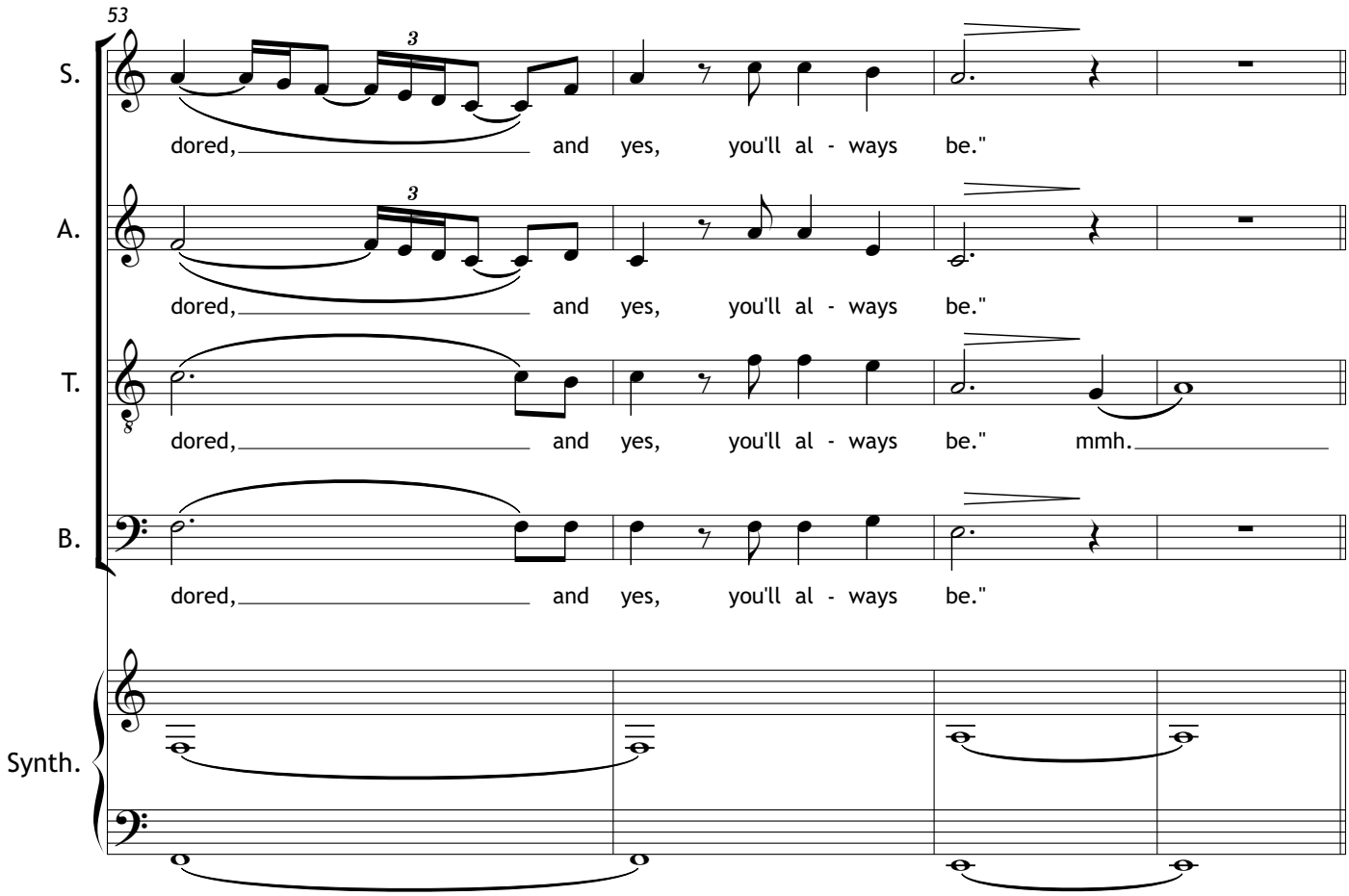

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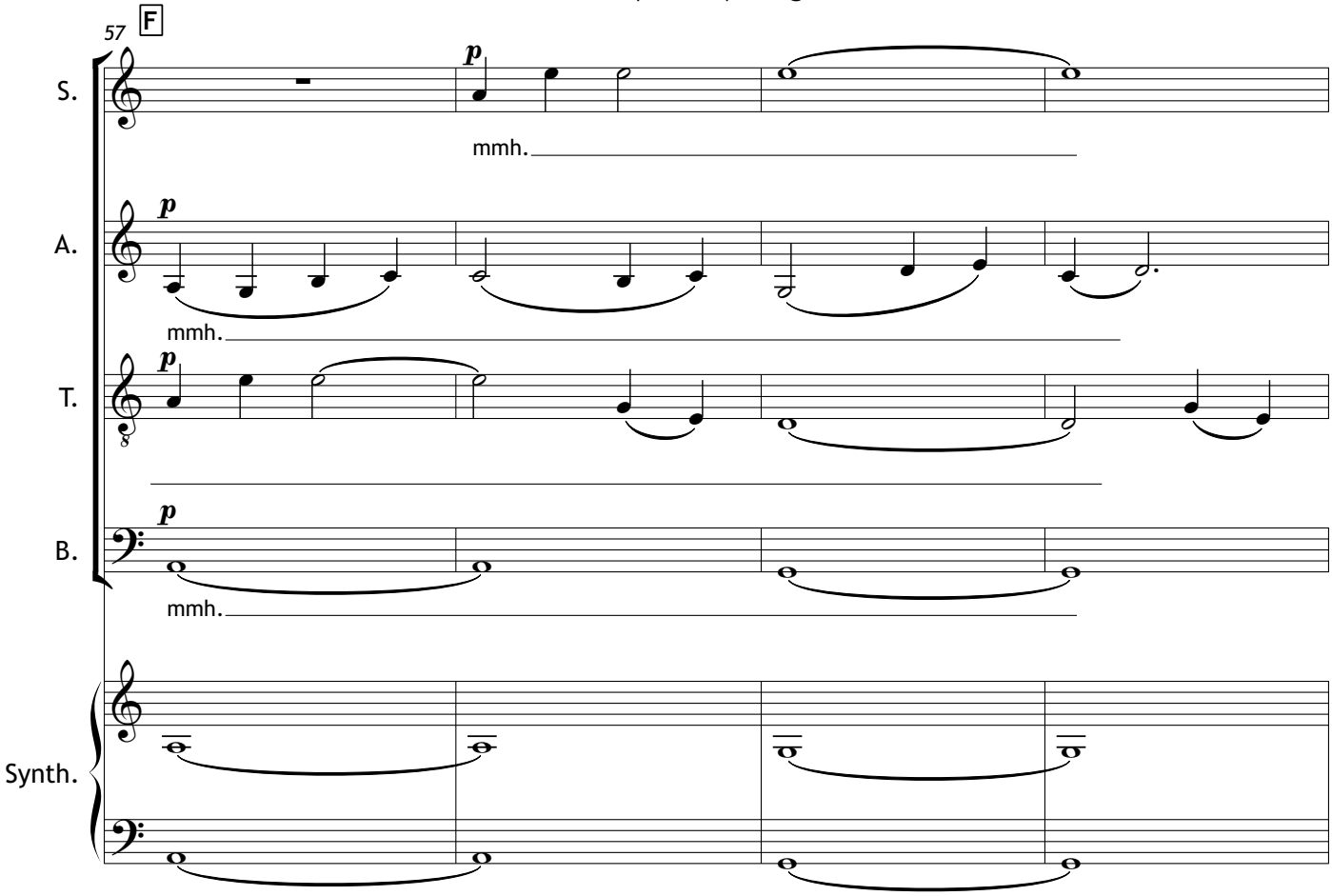

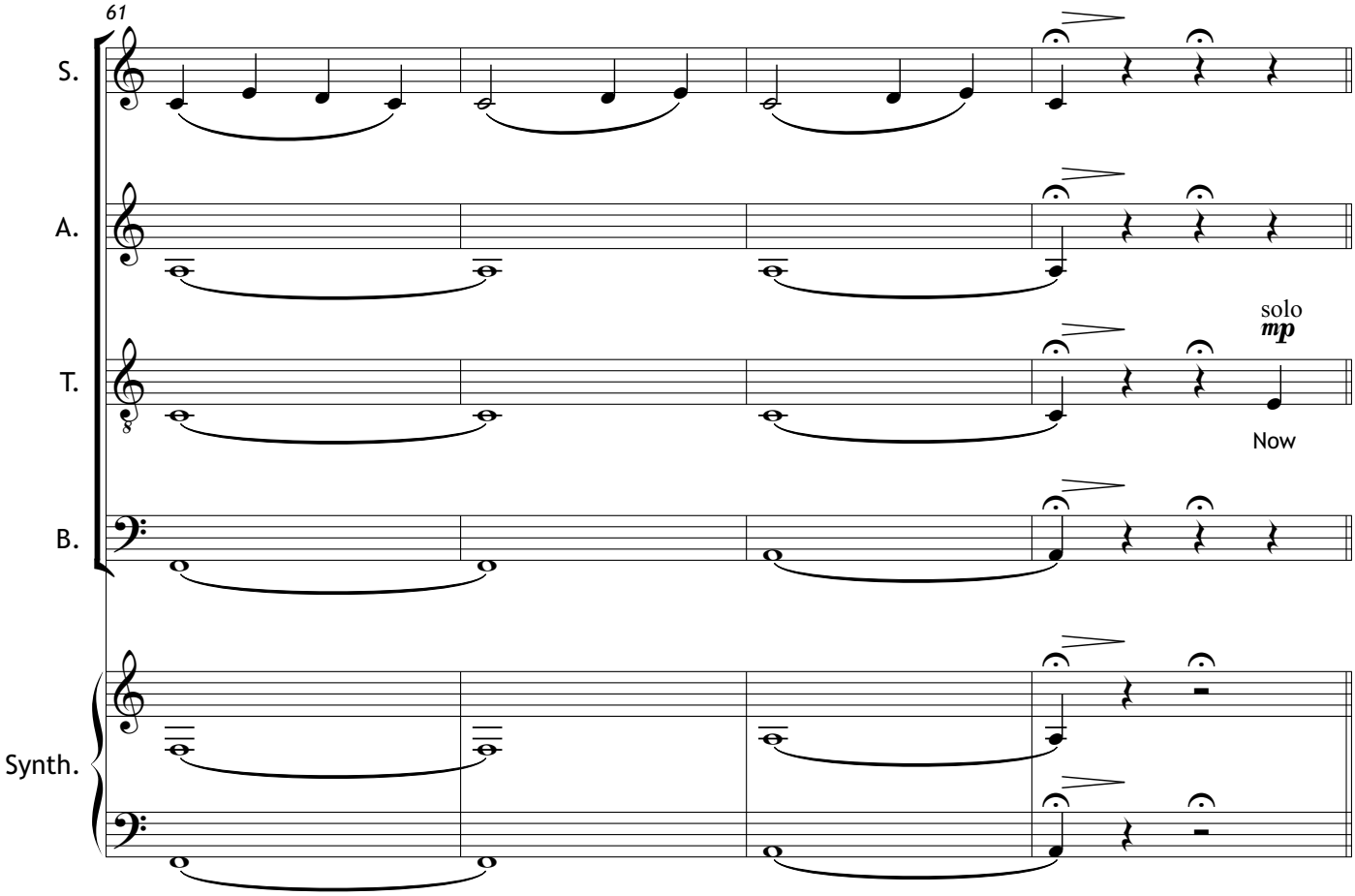

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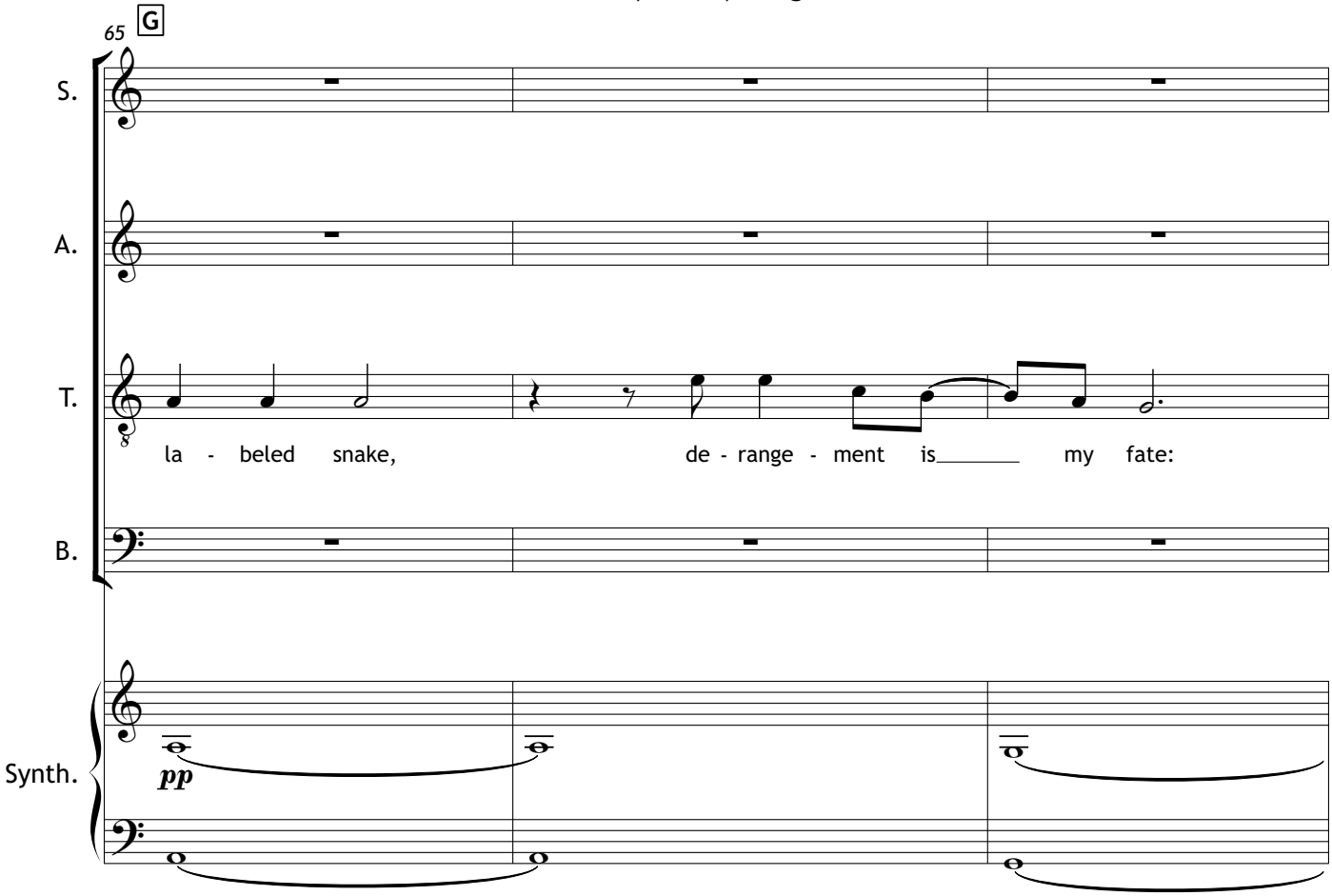

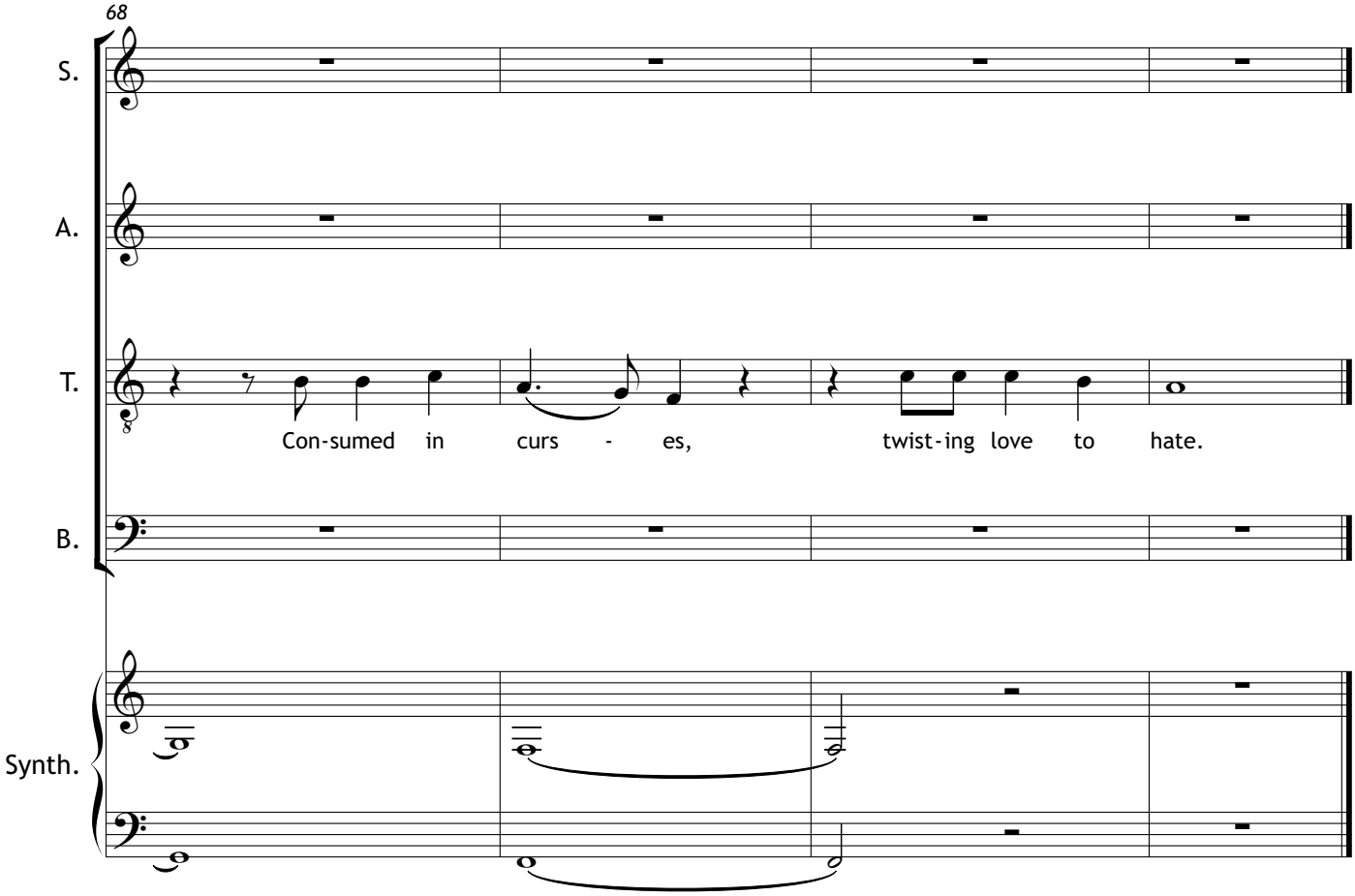

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II. In Darkness Let Me Dwell

This is a song to give lie to any idea that depression is a modern construct. Over four hundred years old, it is despair and melancholy presented as existential architecture (*"the ground shall sorrow be," "the roof despair, to bar all cheerful light", "the walls of marble black...shall weep"*) where the writer is bound in an unhappy marriage to his woes, which is consummated in a perversion of conjugal ideals not with physical bliss but with death: *"wedded to my woes and bedded in my tomb."* This inversion of aspects of living and death is spelled out forcefully in the last line of the first verse where he begs to be allowed to *"living die."*

The second verse further imbues normally positive aspects of living (eating, drinking, dressing, etc) with pathological natures. Thus pleasurable food is *"grief"* and his own tears served back to him as *"poisoned wine."* His outward dress reflects his inner state with *"my robes my mind shall suit exceeding blackest night,"* and all efforts at escape from emotional turmoil in an intellectual life are dashed as *"my study shall be tragic thoughts."*

The poem ends in complete social isolation and entrapment in dark, supernatural landscapes (*"pale ghosts and frightful shades shall my acquaintance be"*). The final line is somewhat opaque, but seems to suggest that there is a kind of wretched and unfortunate relief ("*hapless joy"*) in something he *"hastes"* to. This most likely refers back to the first stanza and *"living die, till death doth come."* Thus death, whether the death of a vibrant state while alive or the end of life, itself, is seen as a pathological pleasure in that it releases the writer from the poisonous "marriage" to grief.

This sense that life is suffering and death a release calls back (at least to Stargazer) to Tolkien's idea of *leithian*, release from the bondage of existence in a corrupted world (explicitly mentioned in the poem *Leithian* from *Tome of Stars*, and addressed in different ways in other poems such as *Unsent*, *ur a lost person*, *Unanswered*, *No One, Axios-Anaxios Redux,* and *Infernitum*, among others).

This poem has a strong, Stargirl-centered, "in-verse" in *It's Light Wherein a Dwell*, where theme, vibe, and words are inverted in the transcendental glow of the beloved.

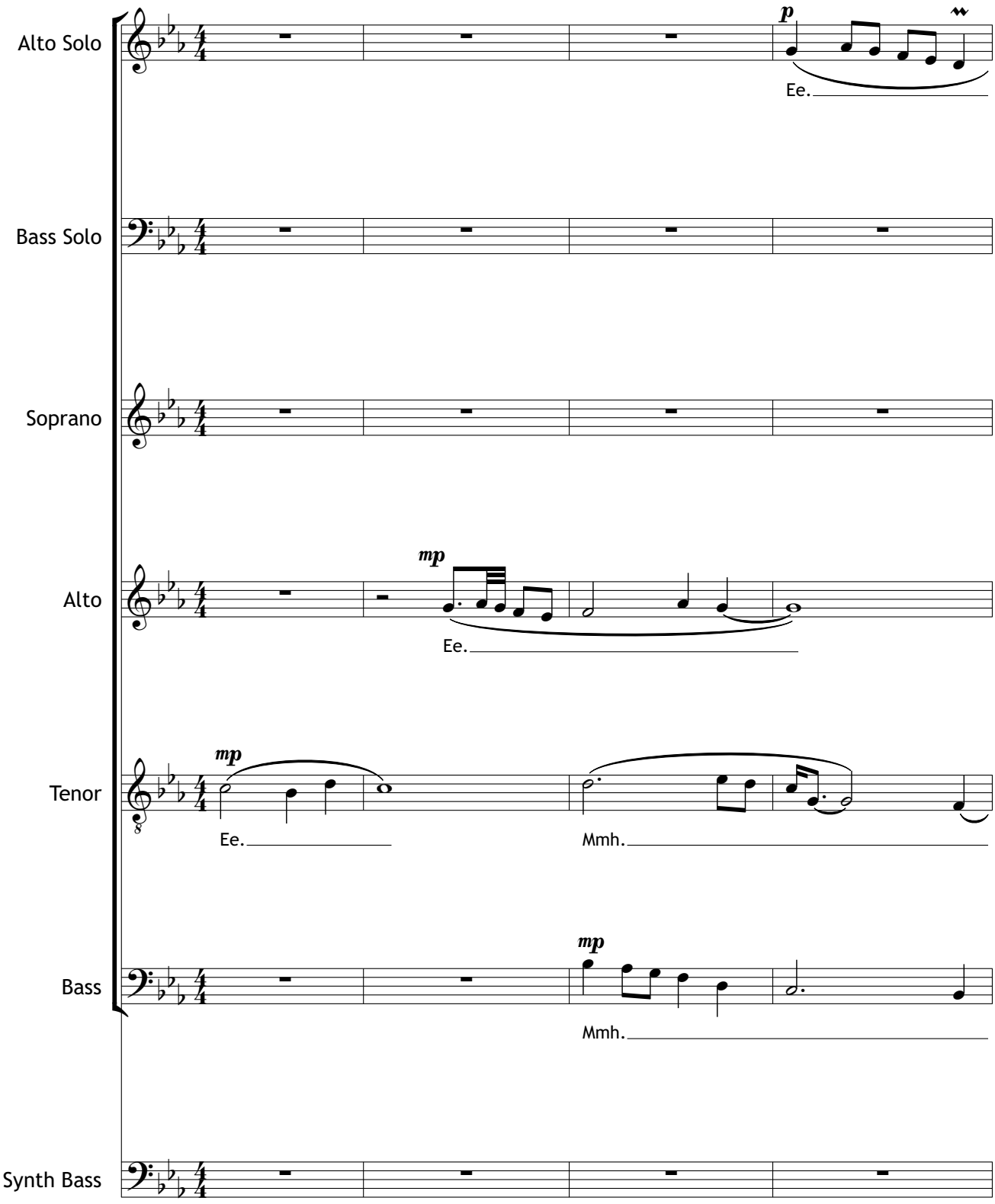
In Darkness Let Me Dwell

In Darkness and in Light: A "Tome of Stars" Companion

John Dowland/Stargazer

Vocal Ensemble

Adagio lamentoso ♩ = 76



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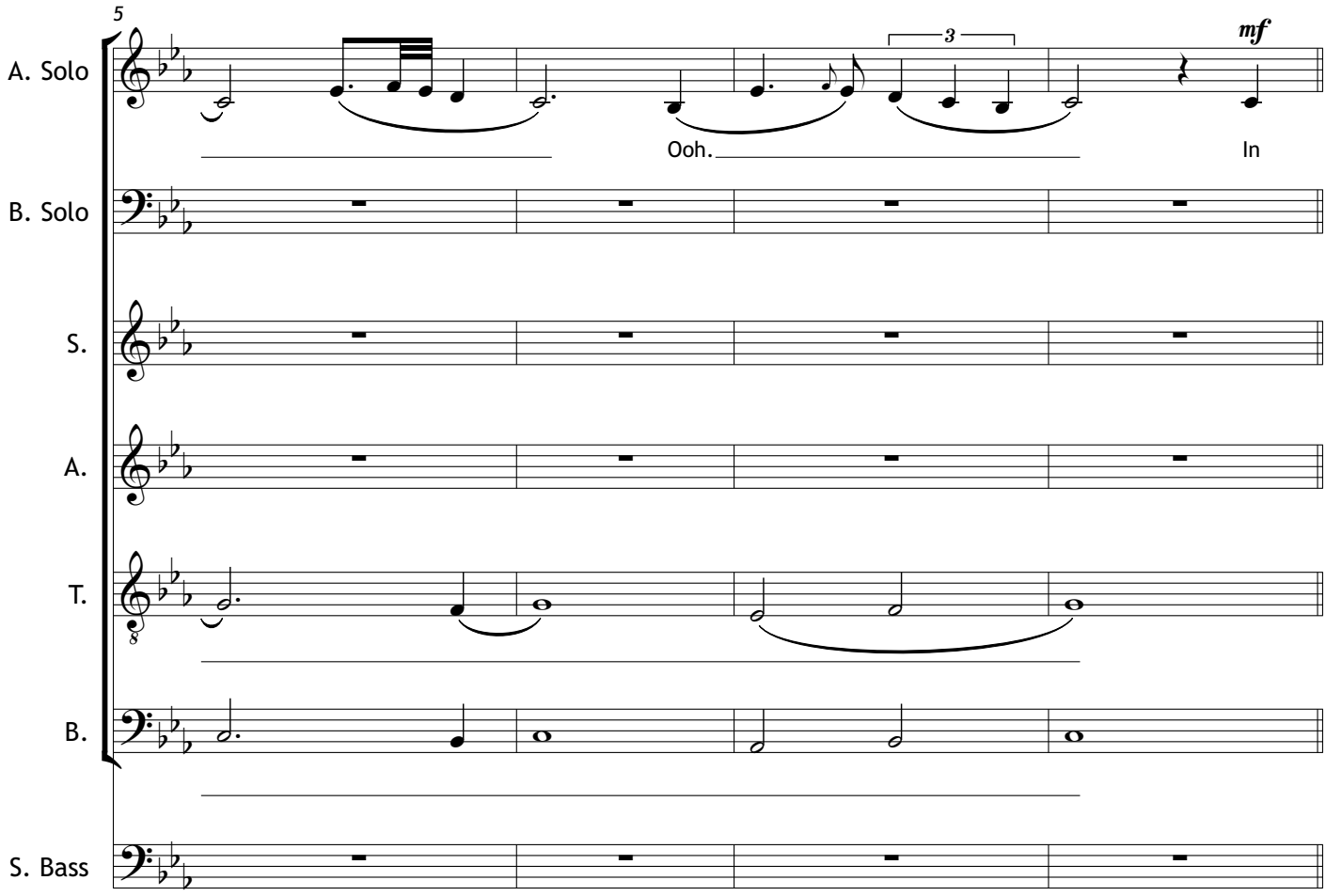

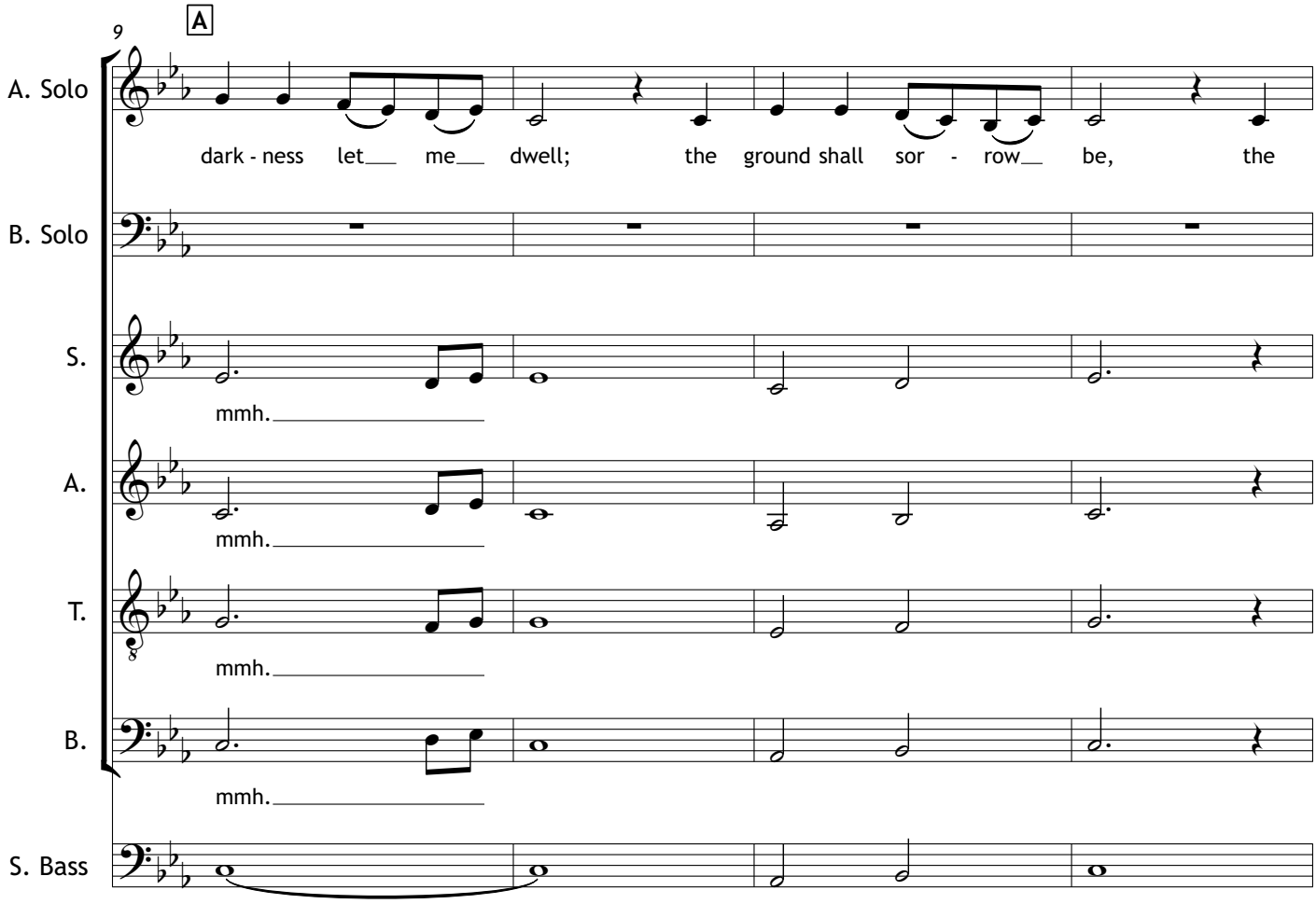

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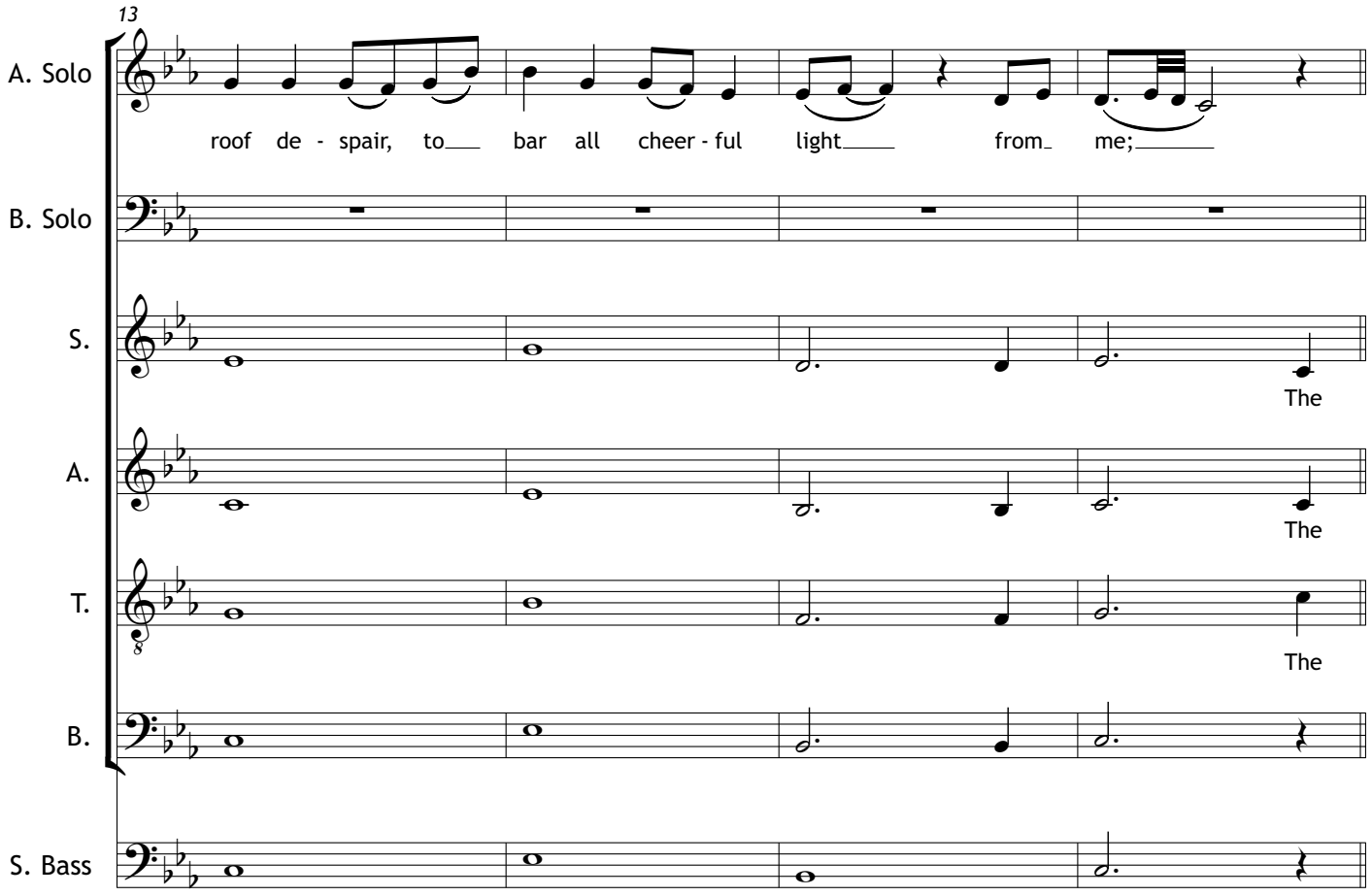

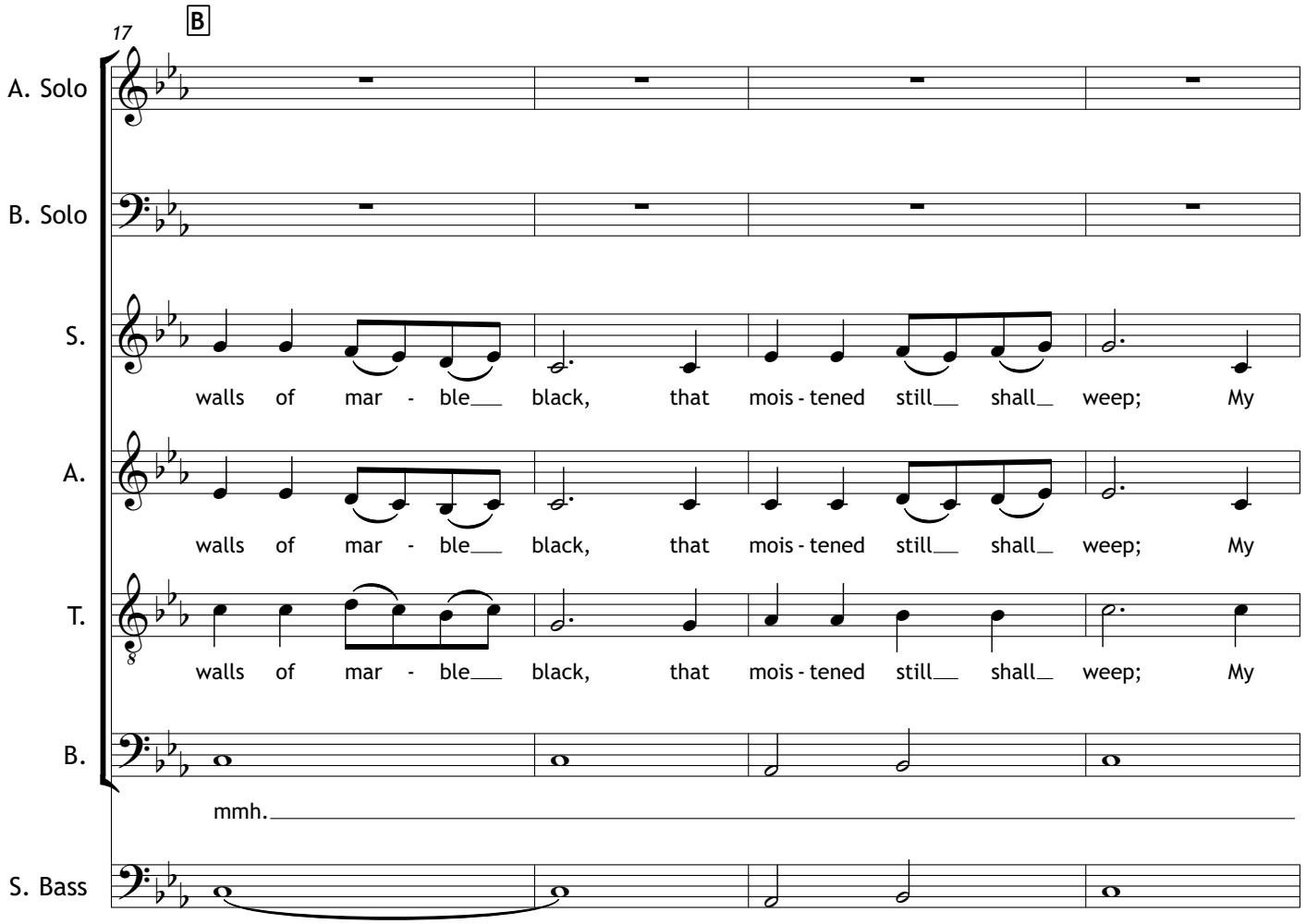

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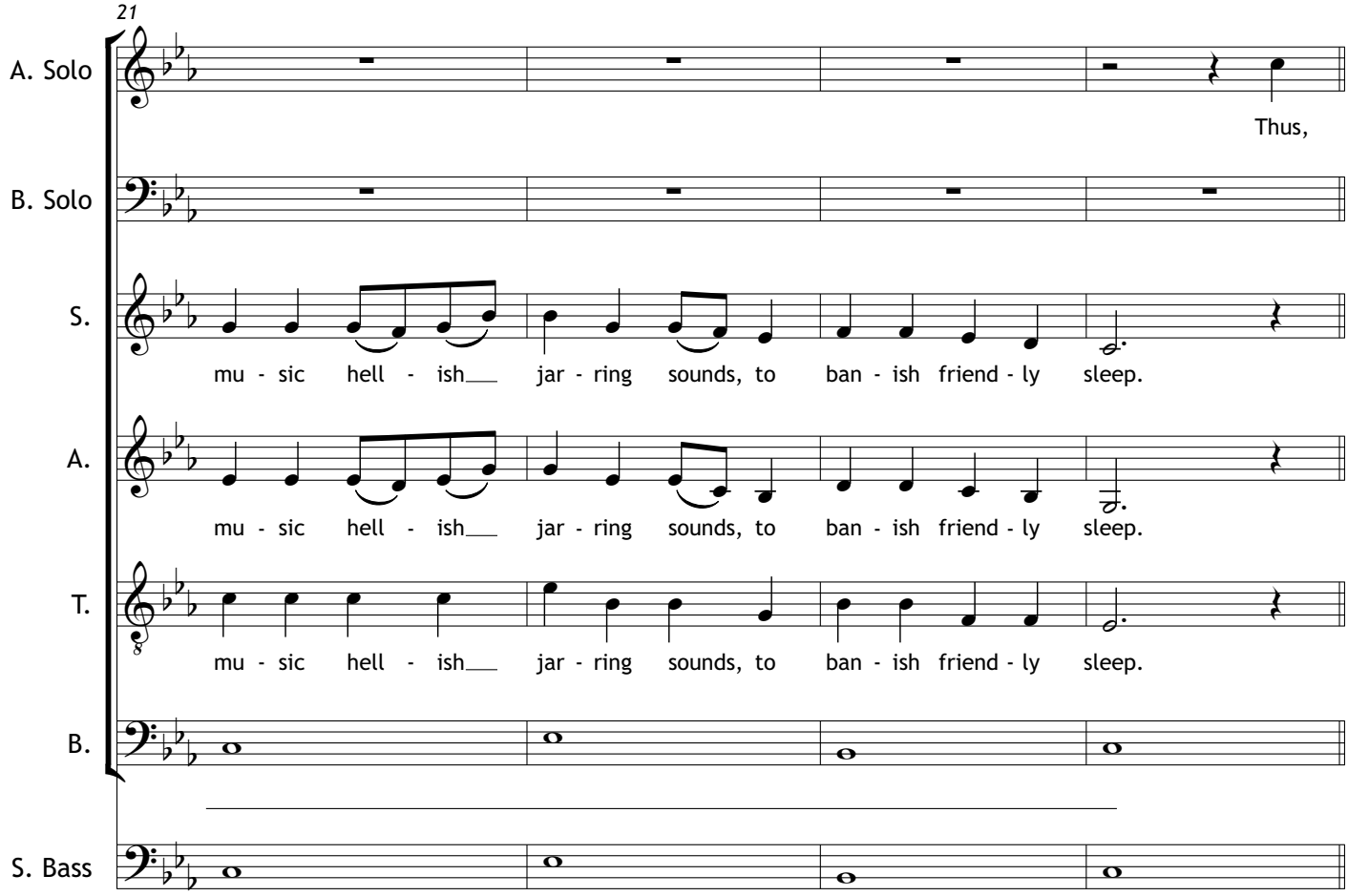

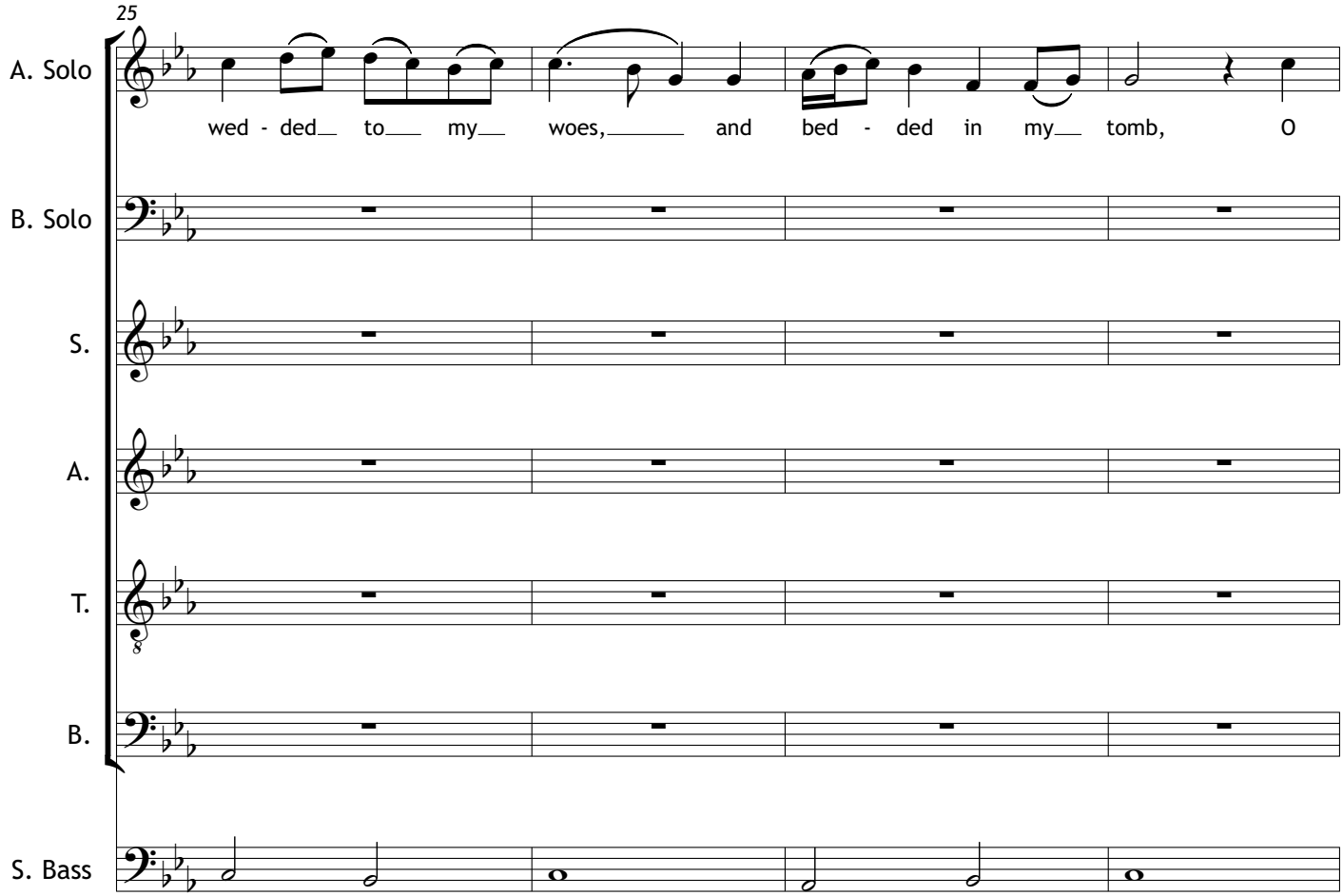

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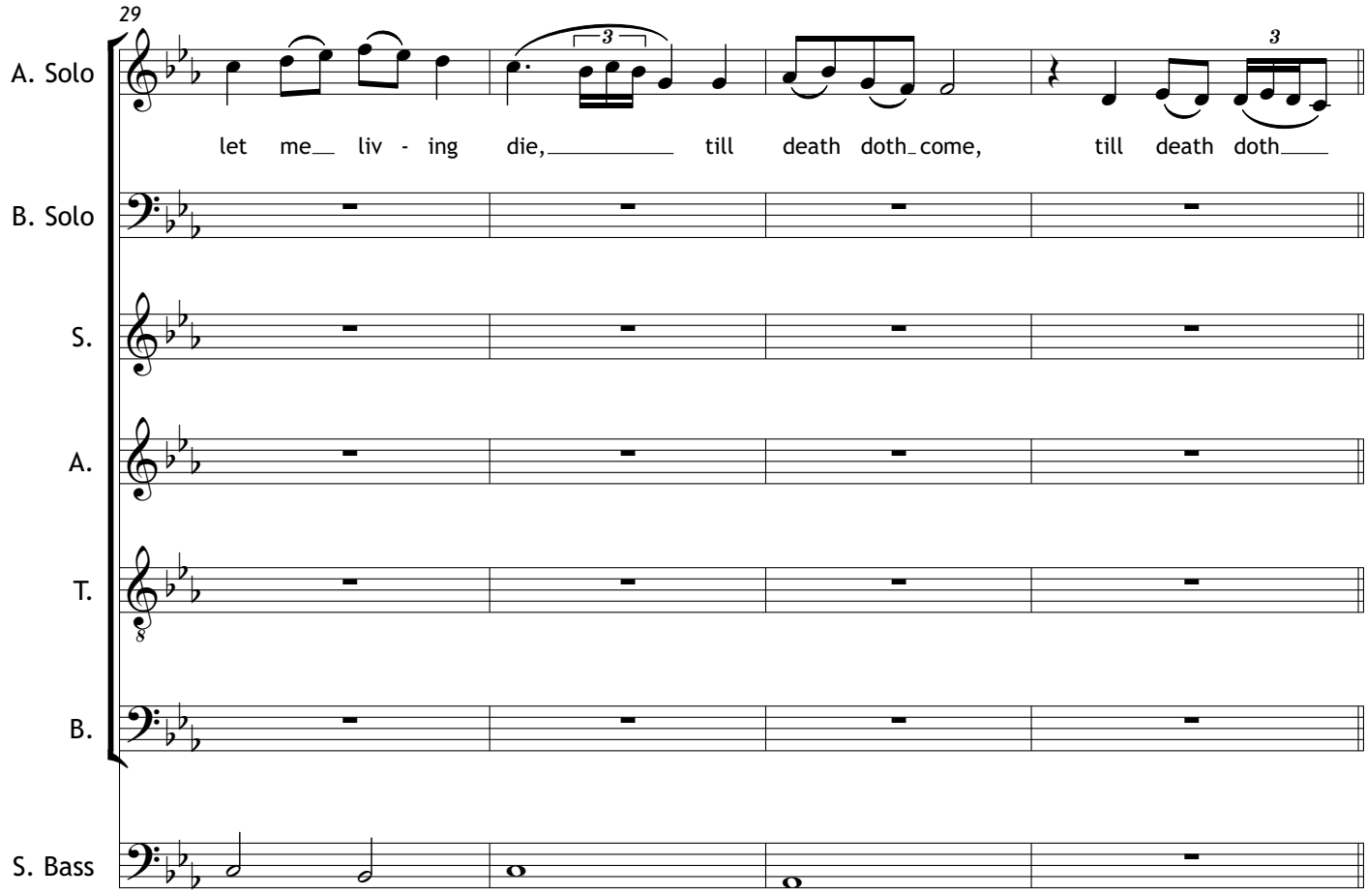

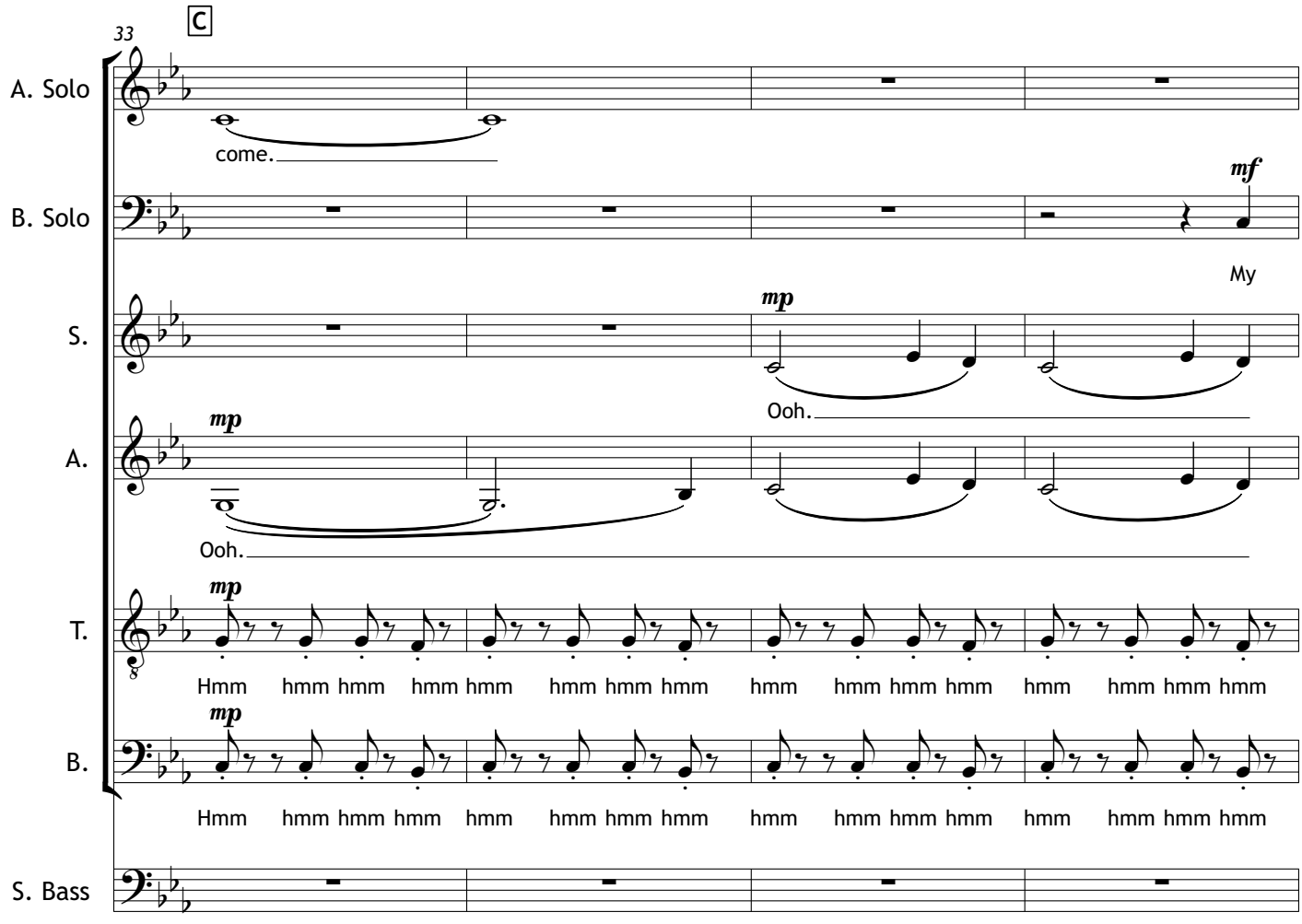

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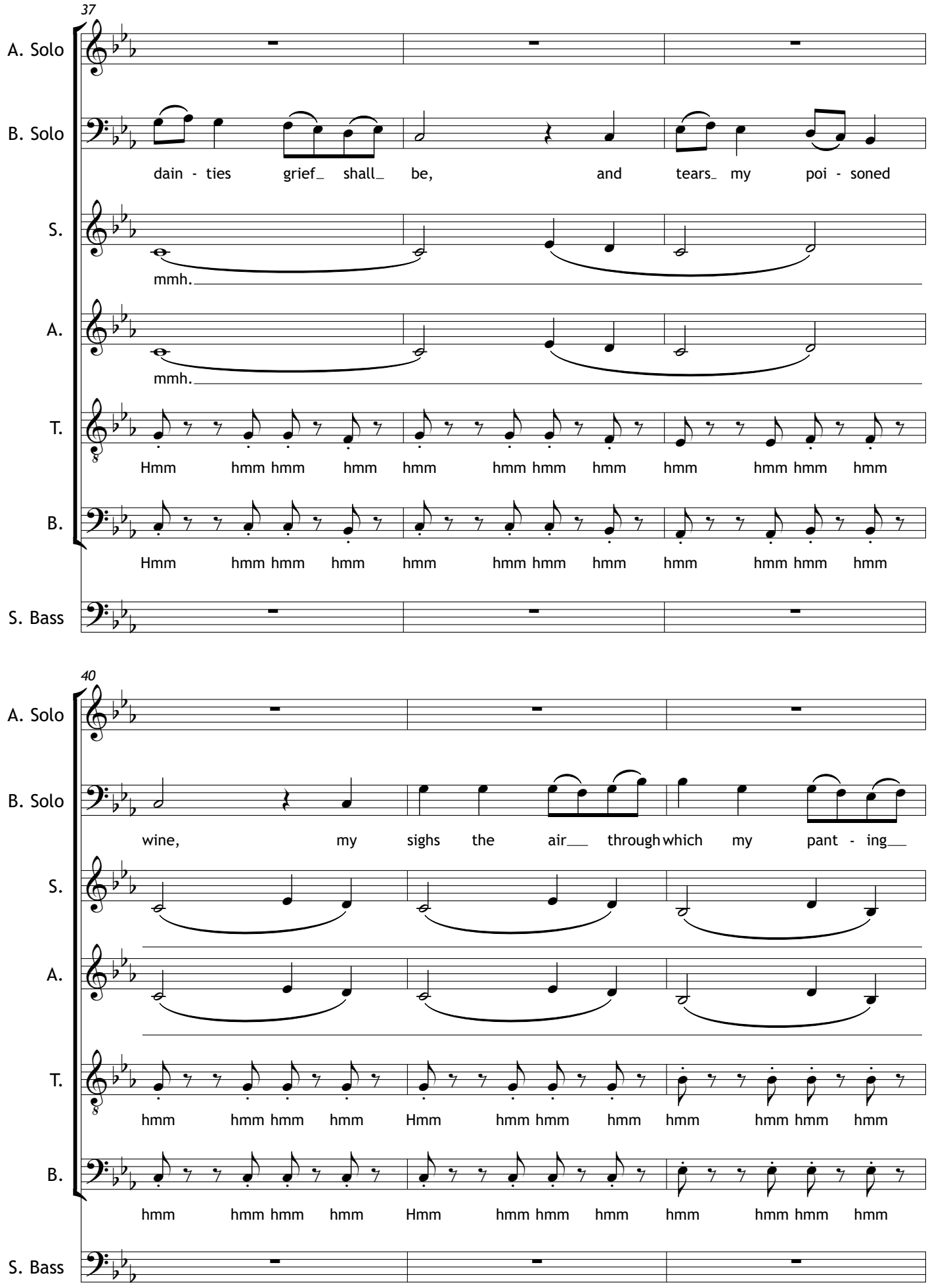

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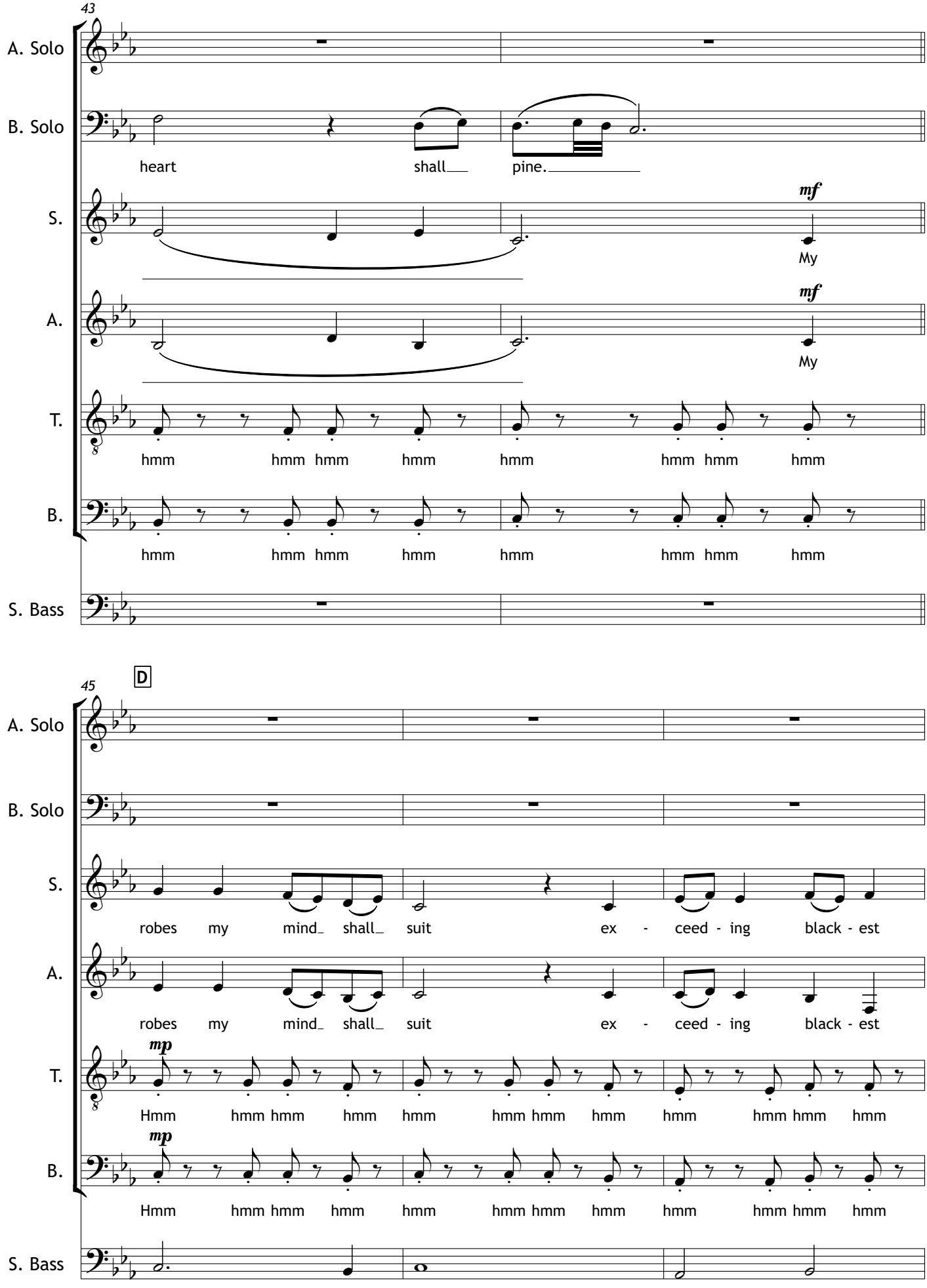

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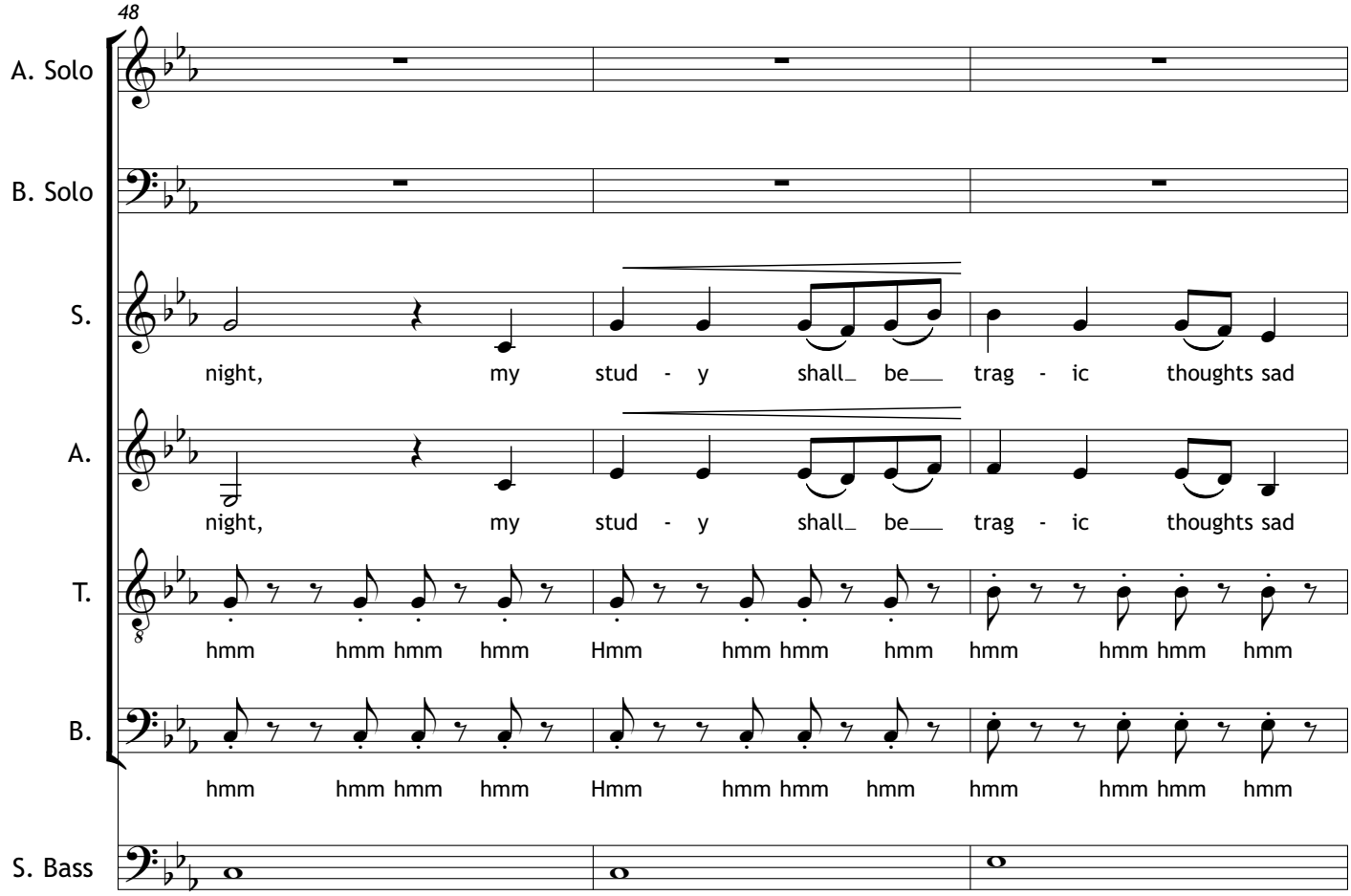

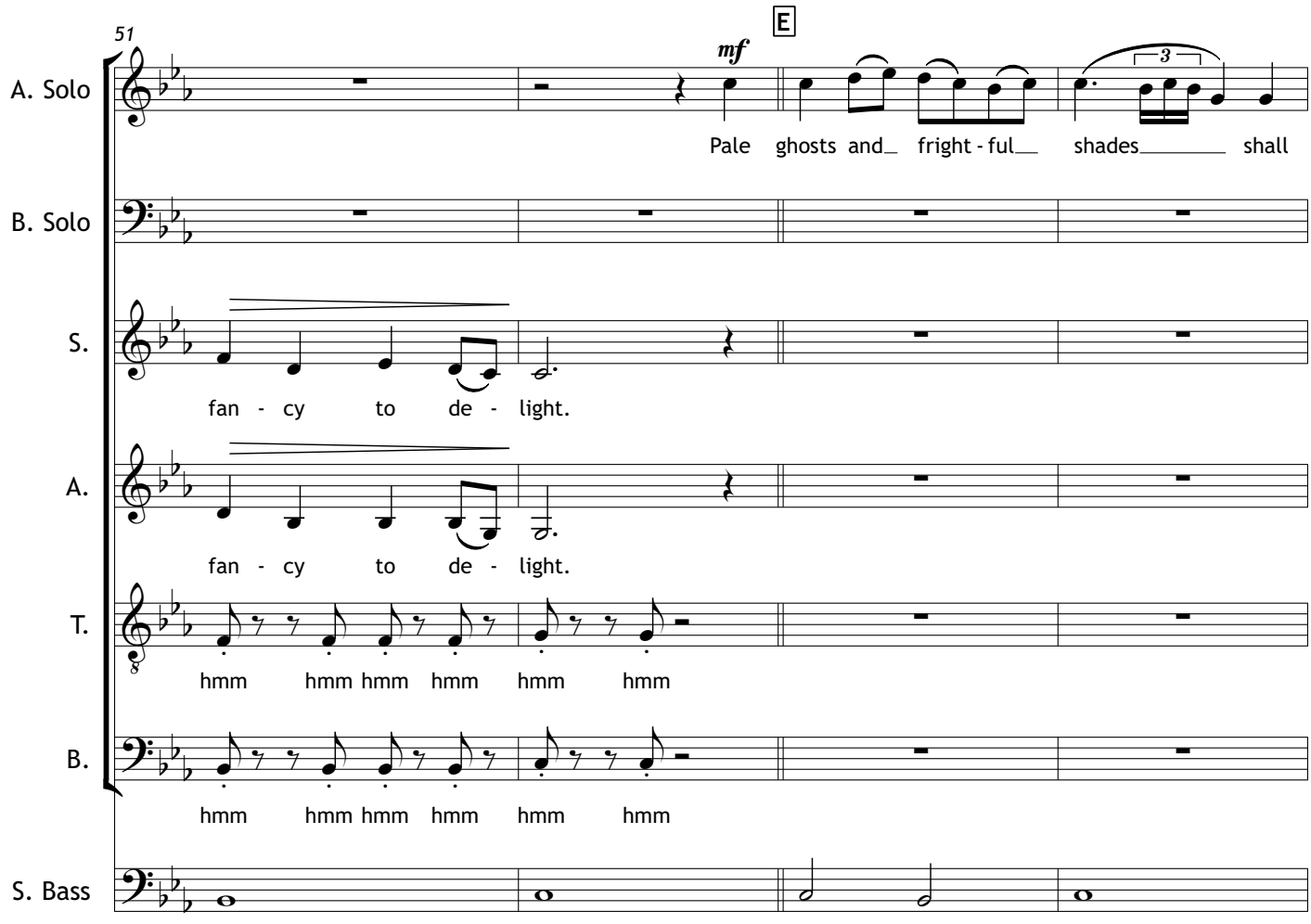

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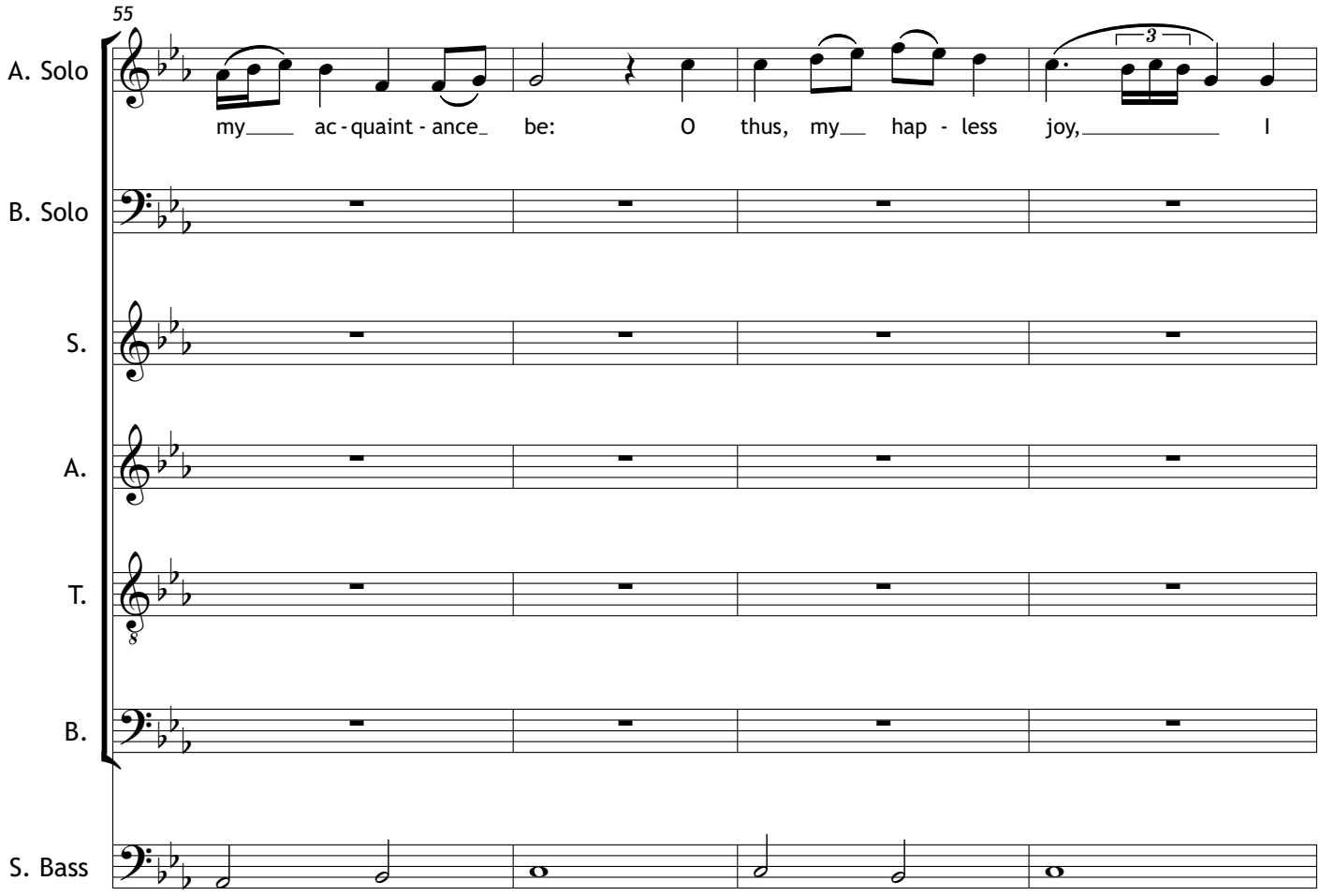

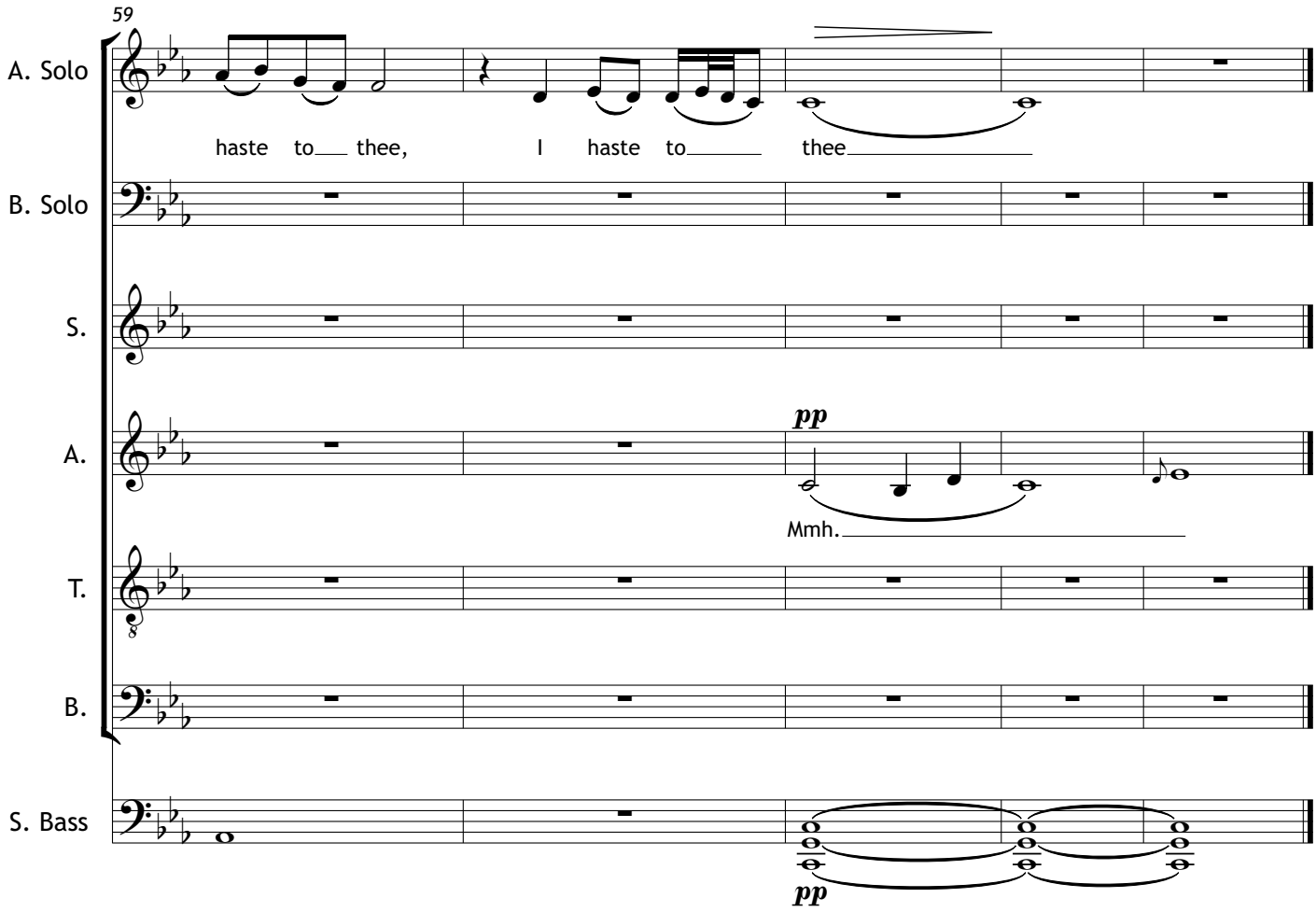

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12. No One

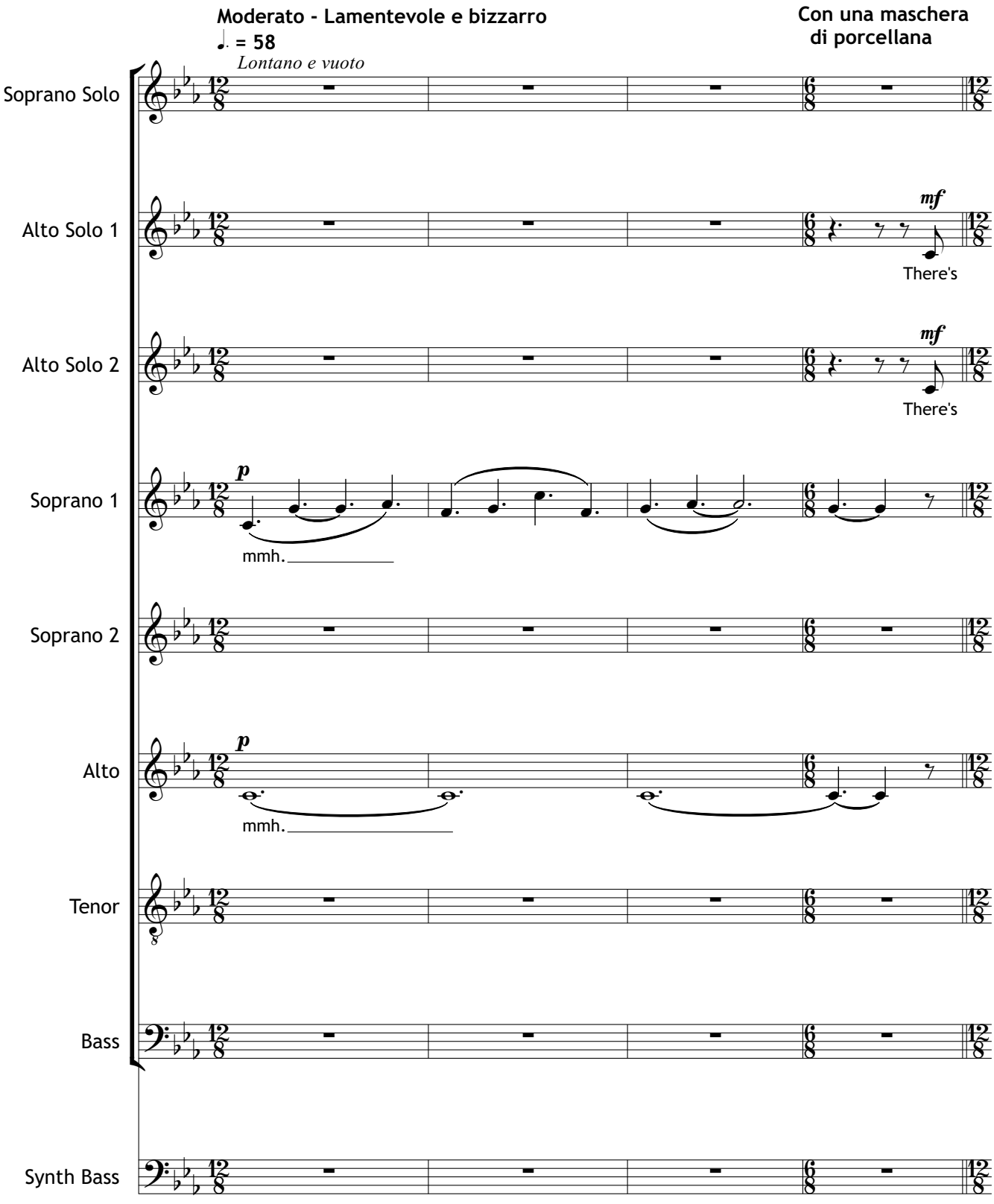
This sonnet tries to convey the feeling of utter aloneness the poet often felt. In the first quatrain he describes the state where the lack of *"stellar shine to quench an endless grief"* is *"a noxious blight"* devoid of love or mercy. He continues in quatrain two to wonder if he were not so unique in this pain as he often supposed. He had felt for most of his life that people's interactions in society were terribly superficial, to him appearing empty, and therefore if true, many people must be feeling some form of loneliness as he did. In the third quatrain he blames the Stargirl explicitly, not as a judgment, but reflecting on her judgement of him. She was his salvation, the bridge walked *"to reach the stars."* In his mind, she chose to destroy that bridge while he crossed, leaving him *"with only scars"* and *"condemned."* The poem concludes with abject begging where he pleads for release from this state of her absence that he likens to hell.

No One

Anemochory: Item 4 of "Tome of Stars"

Stargazer

Vocal Ensemble



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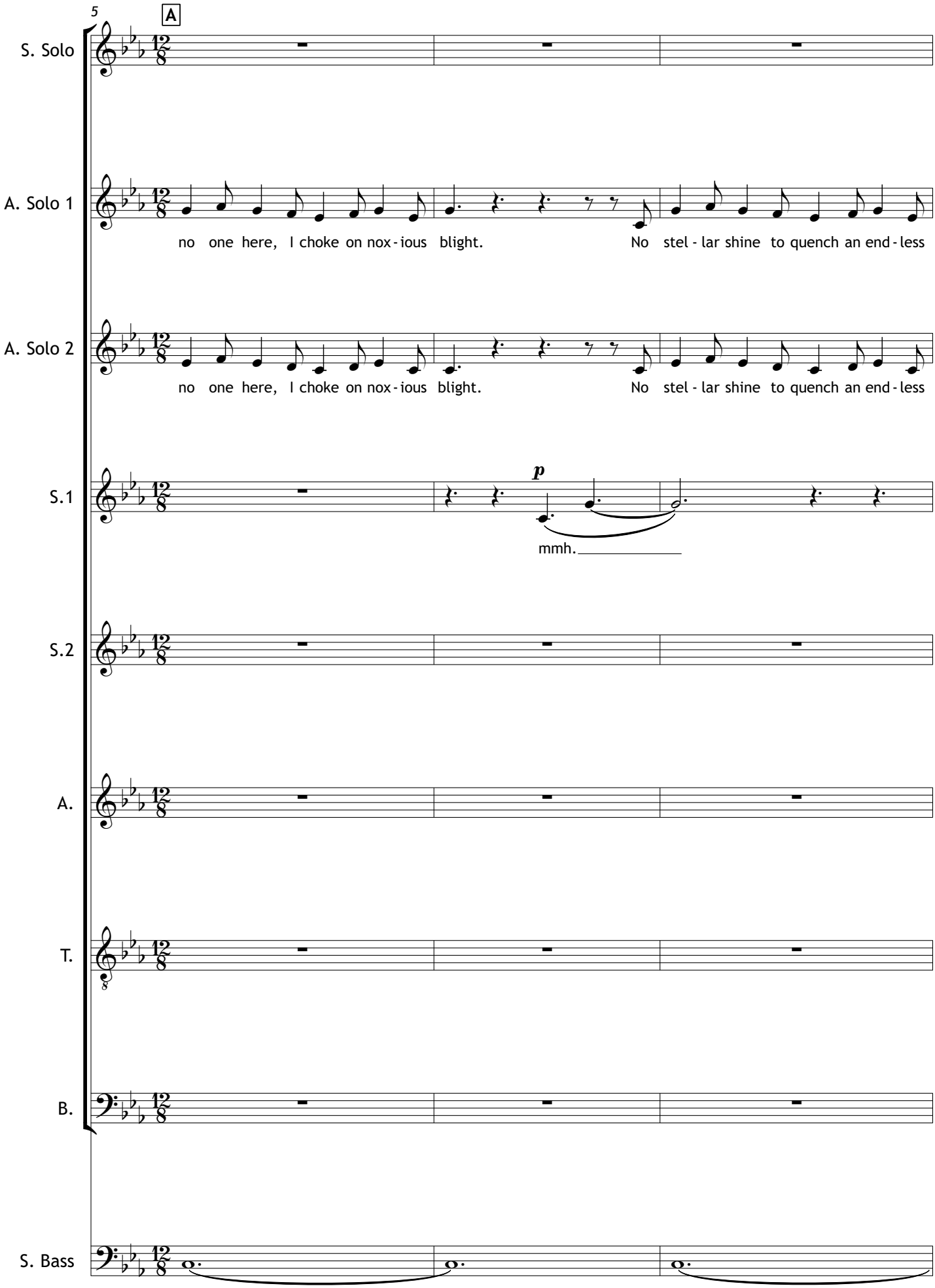

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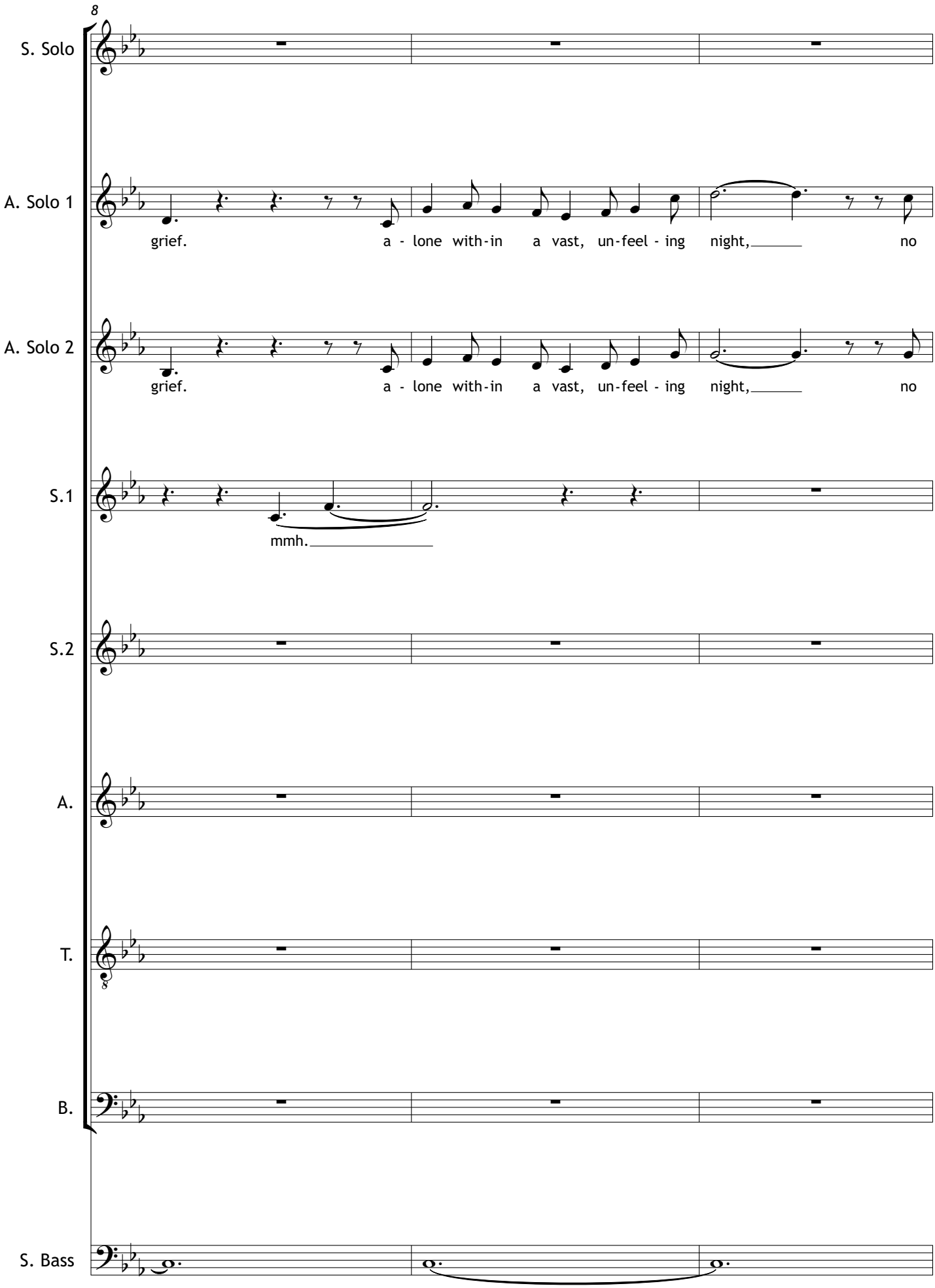

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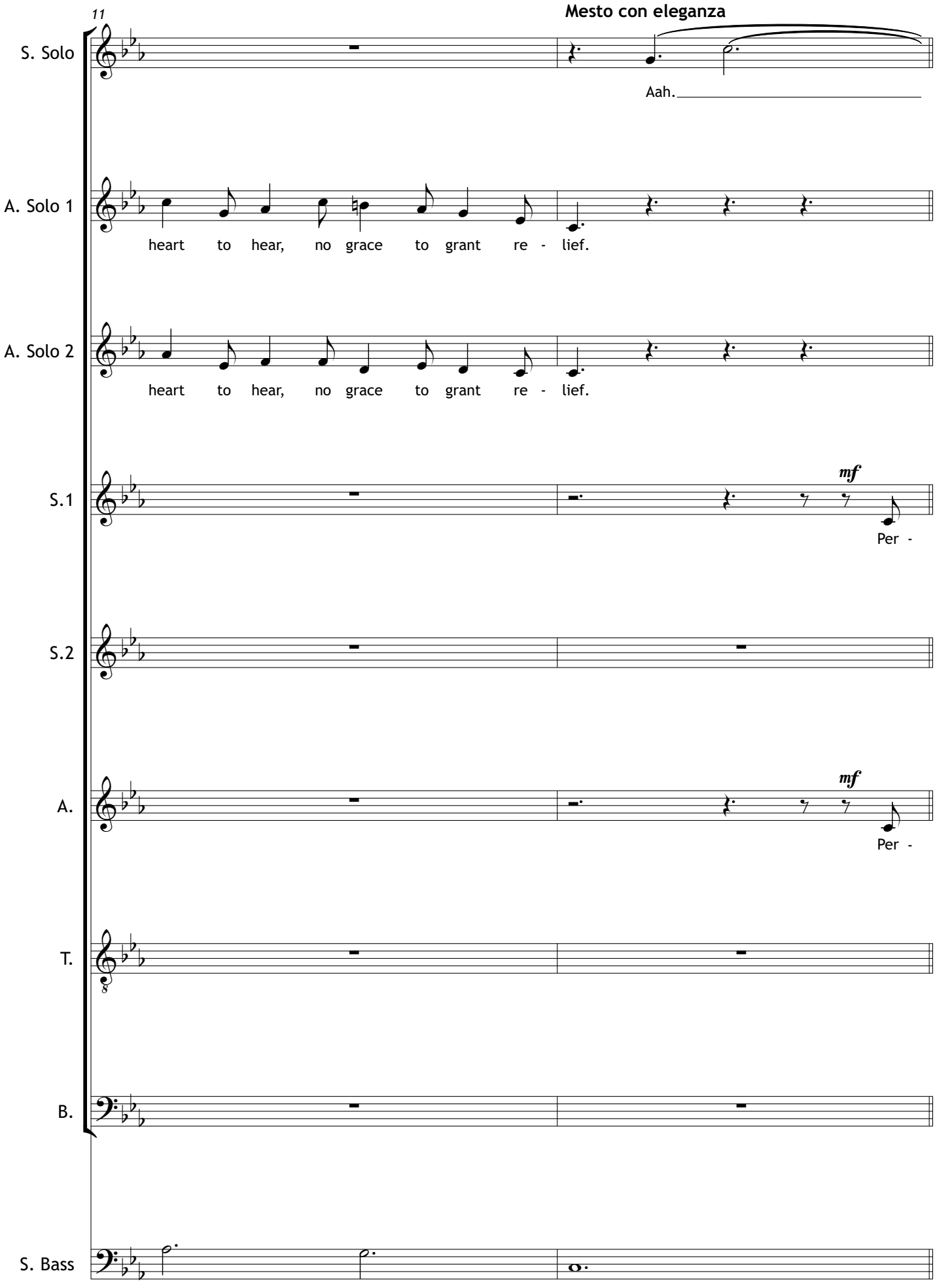

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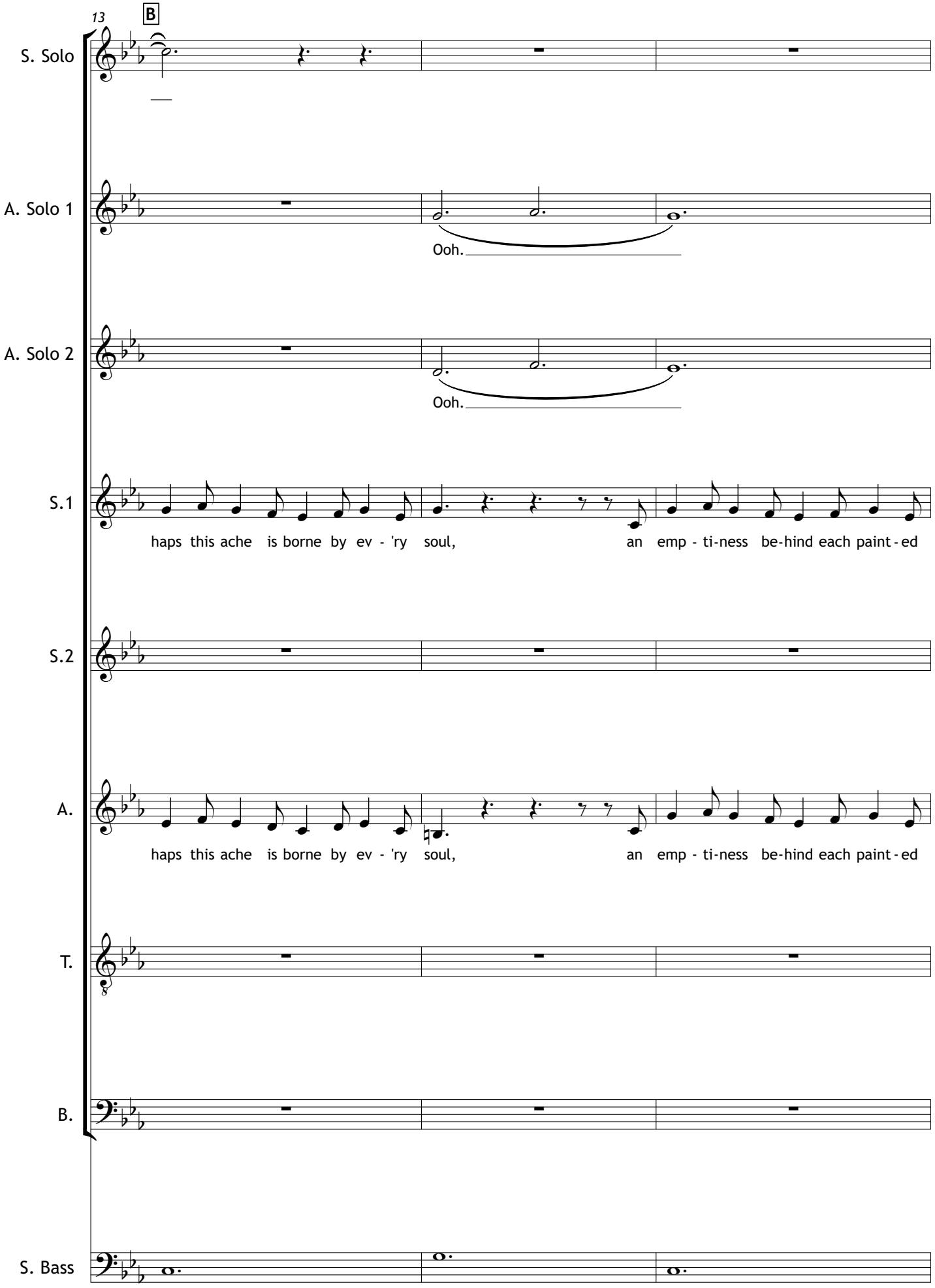

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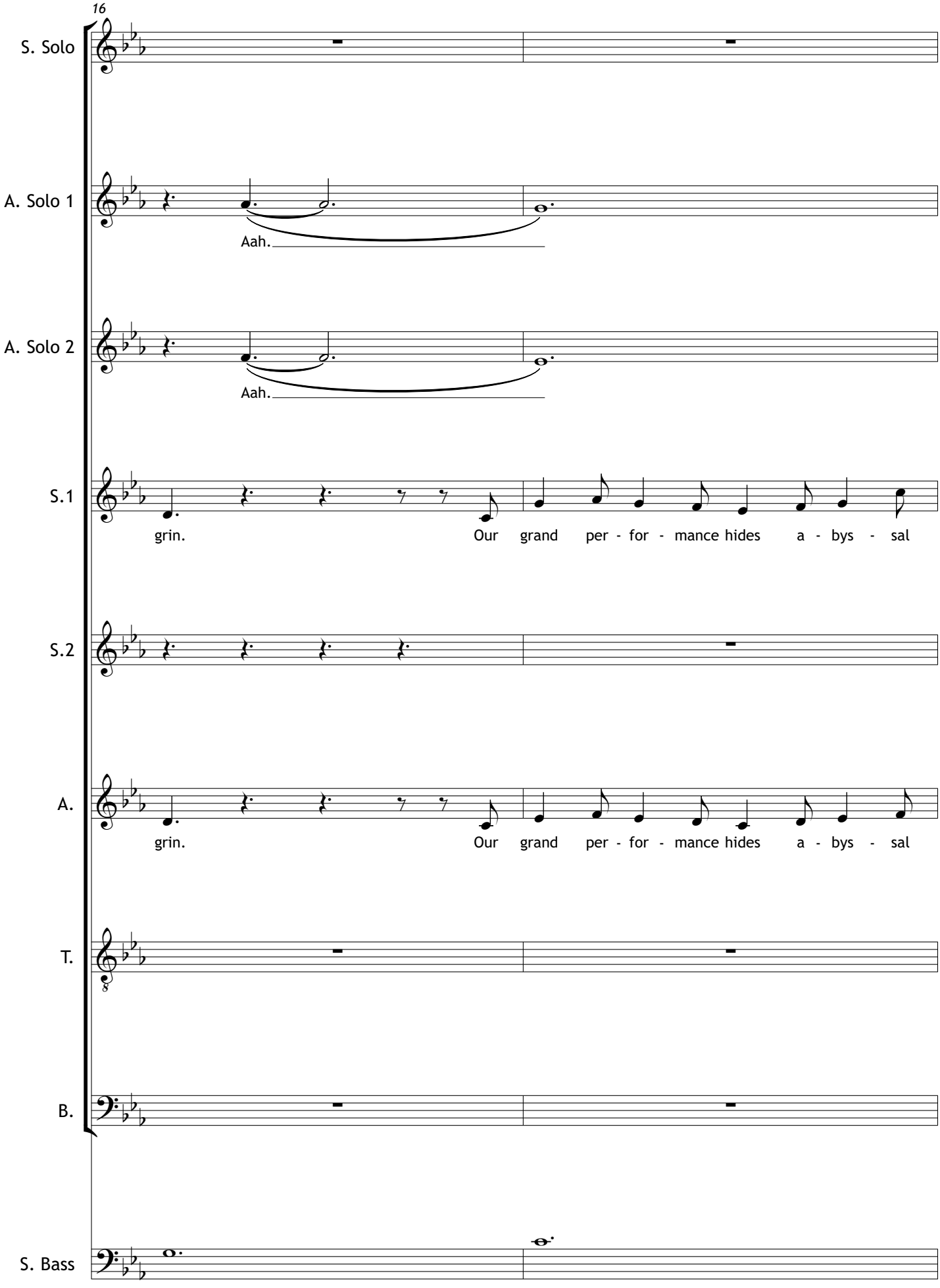

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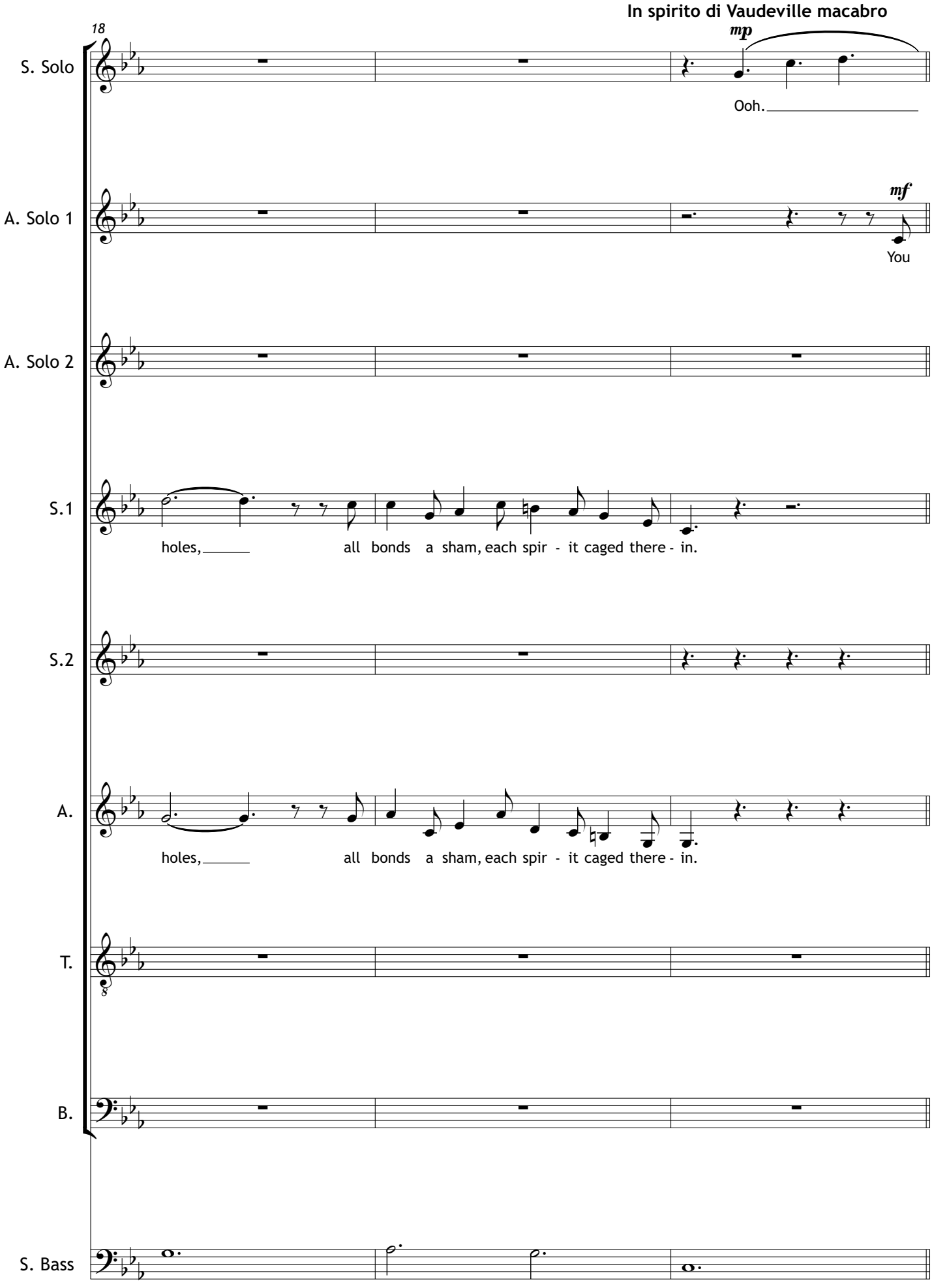

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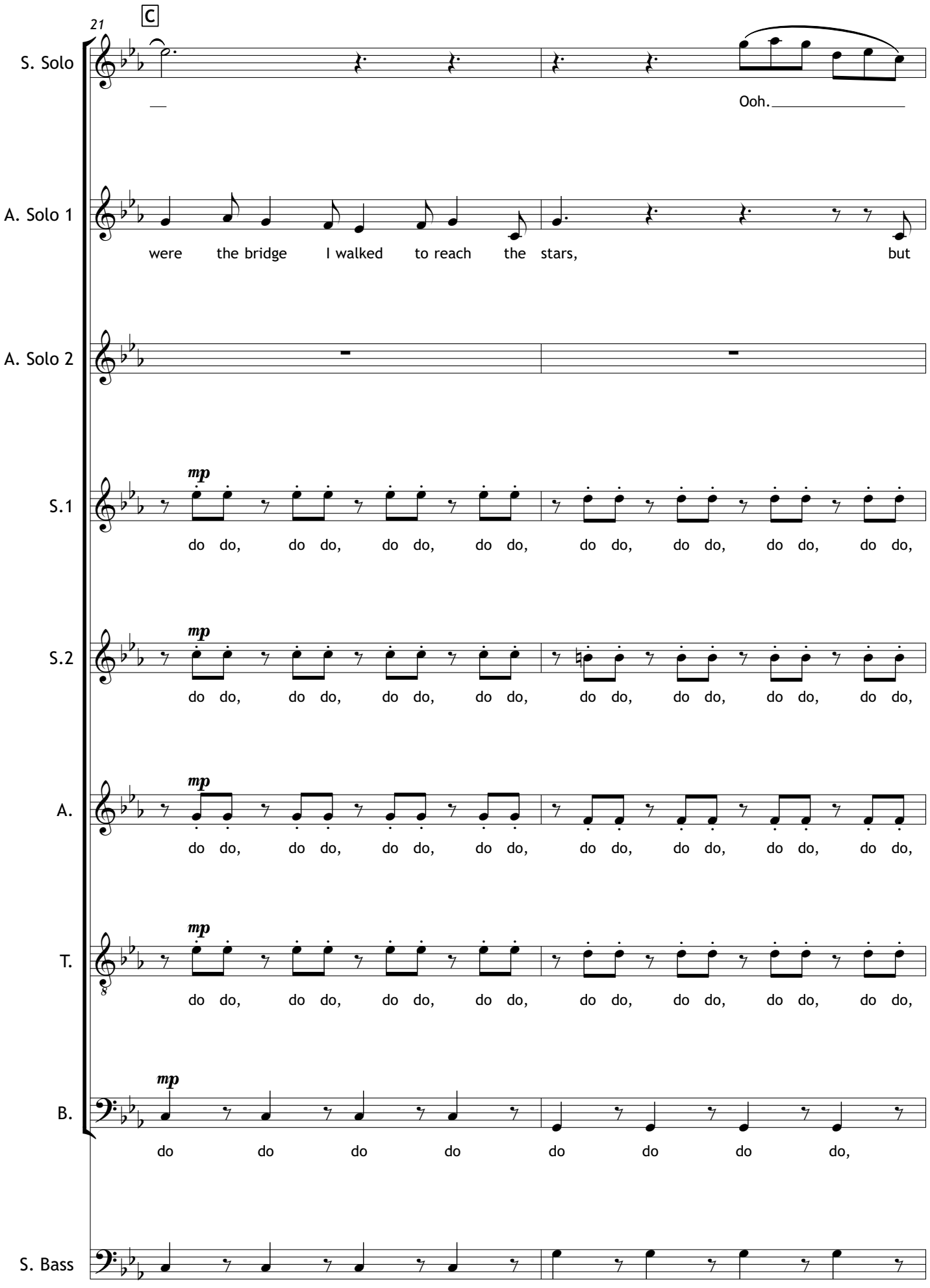

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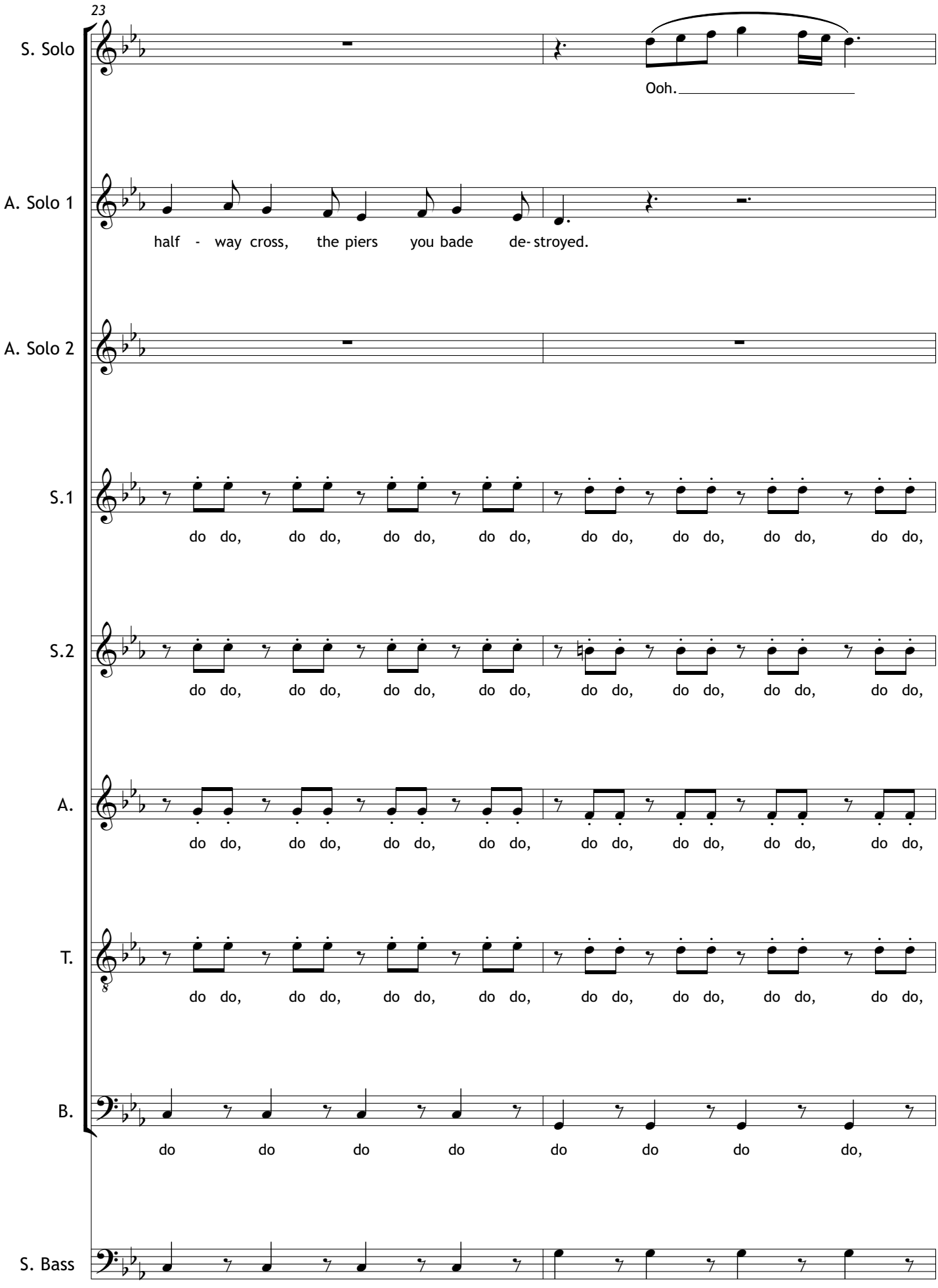

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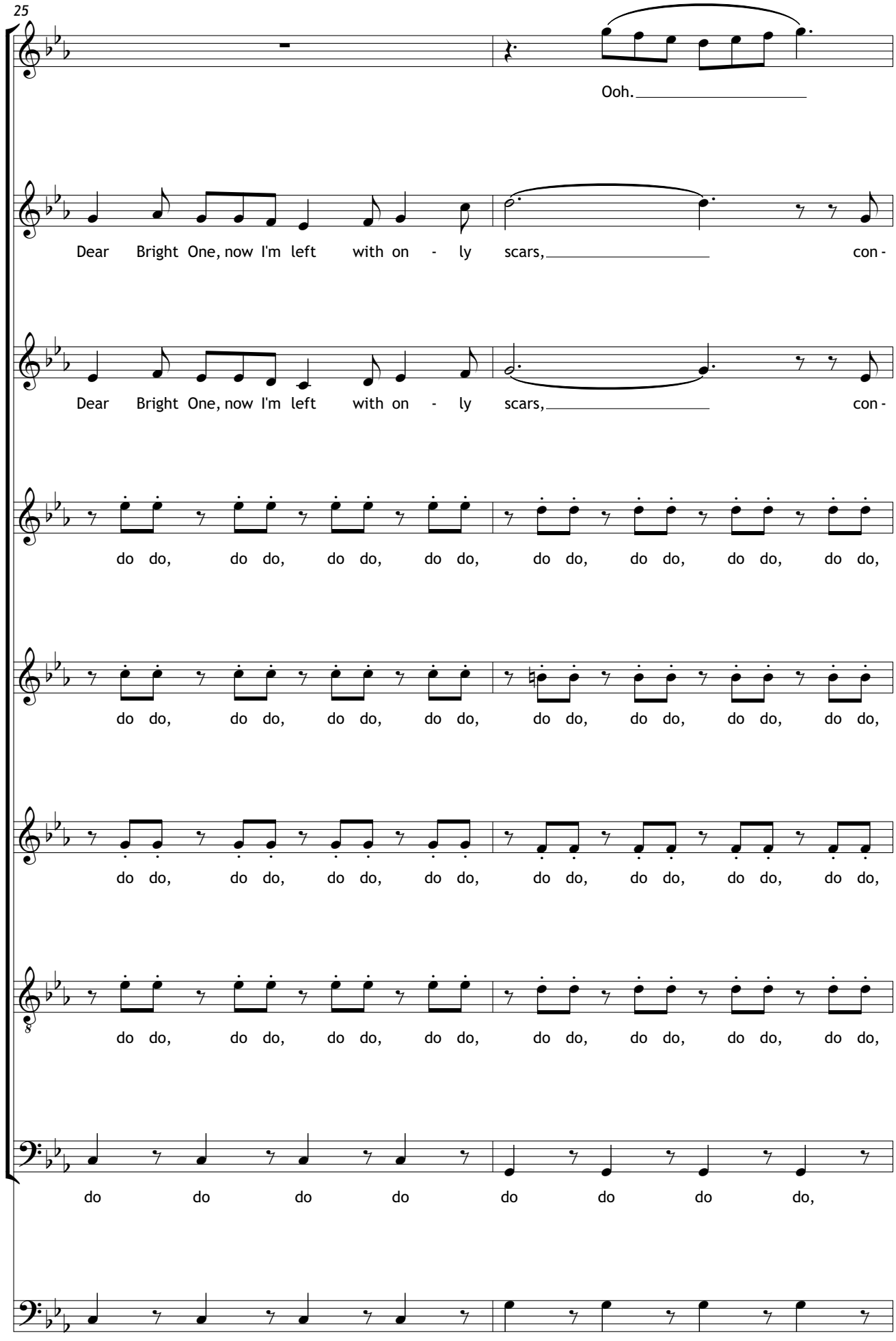

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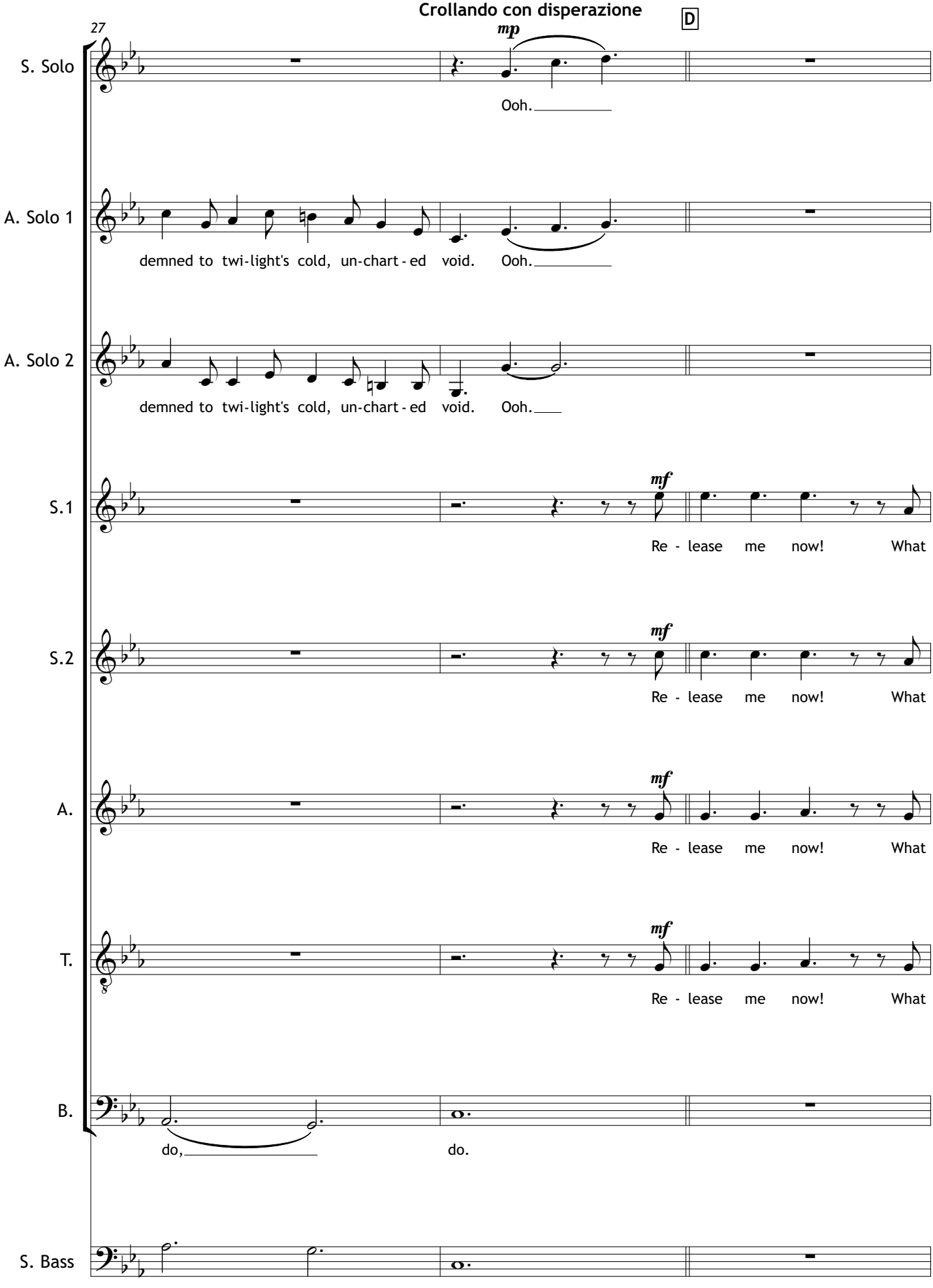

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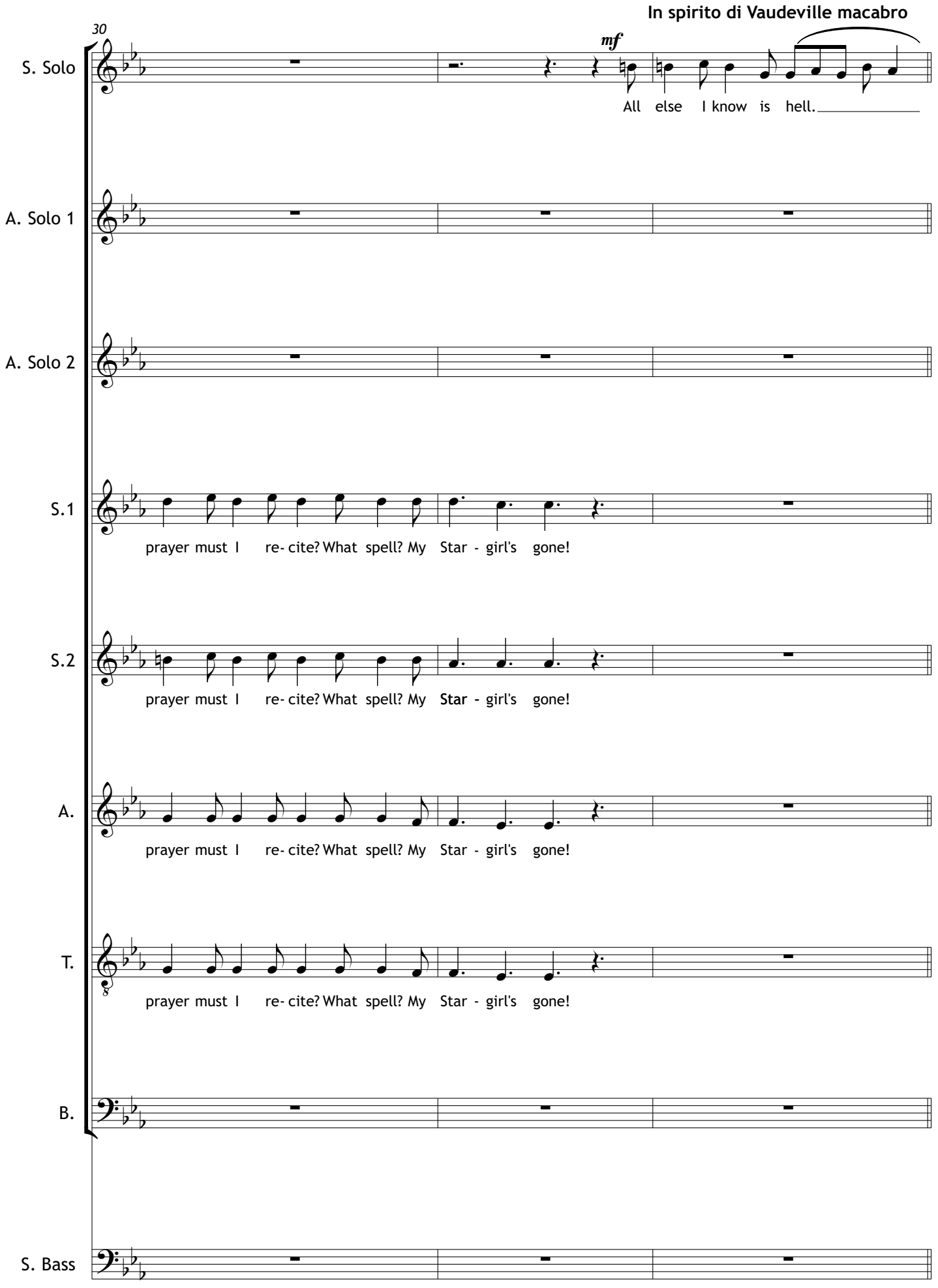

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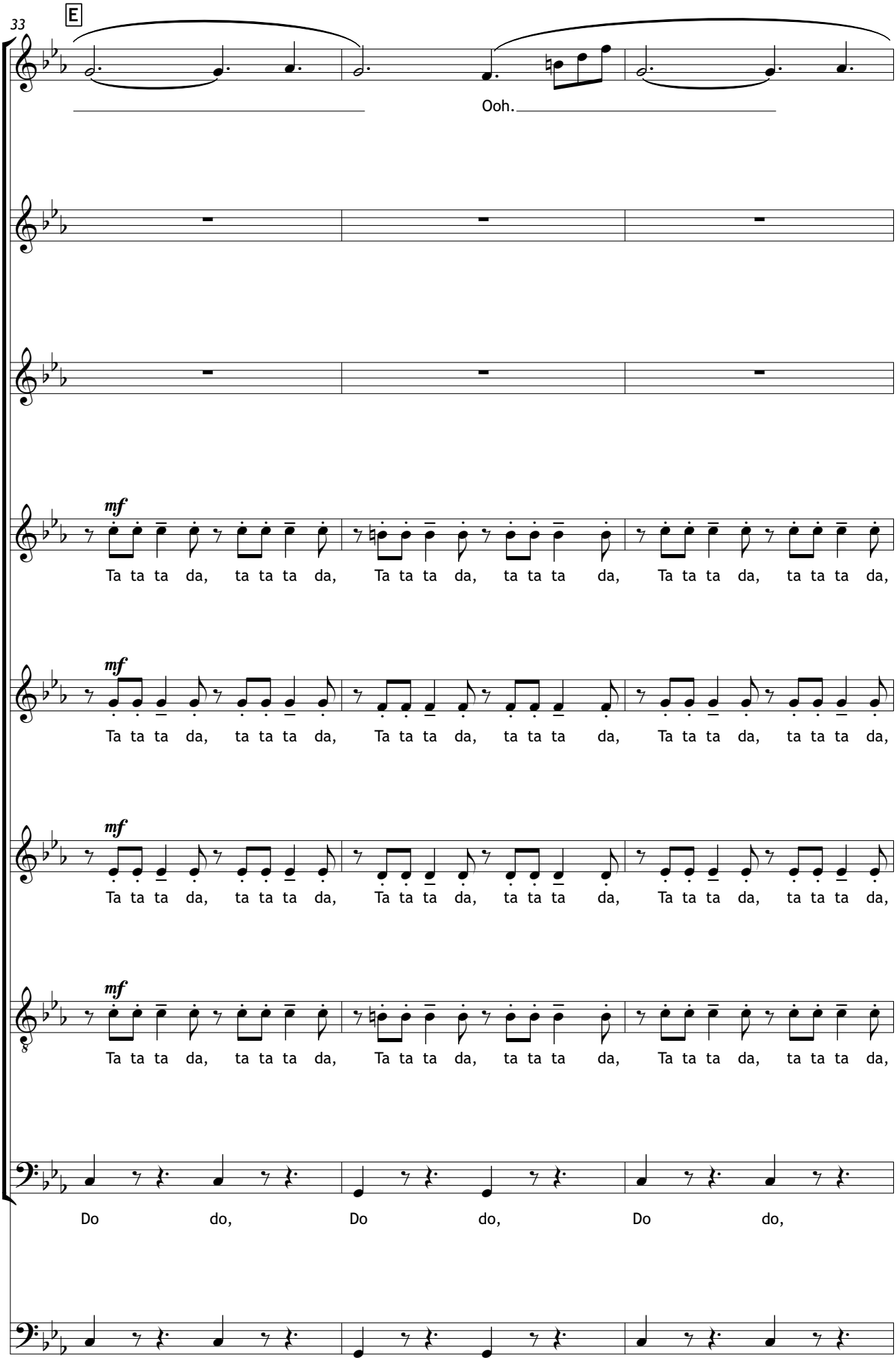

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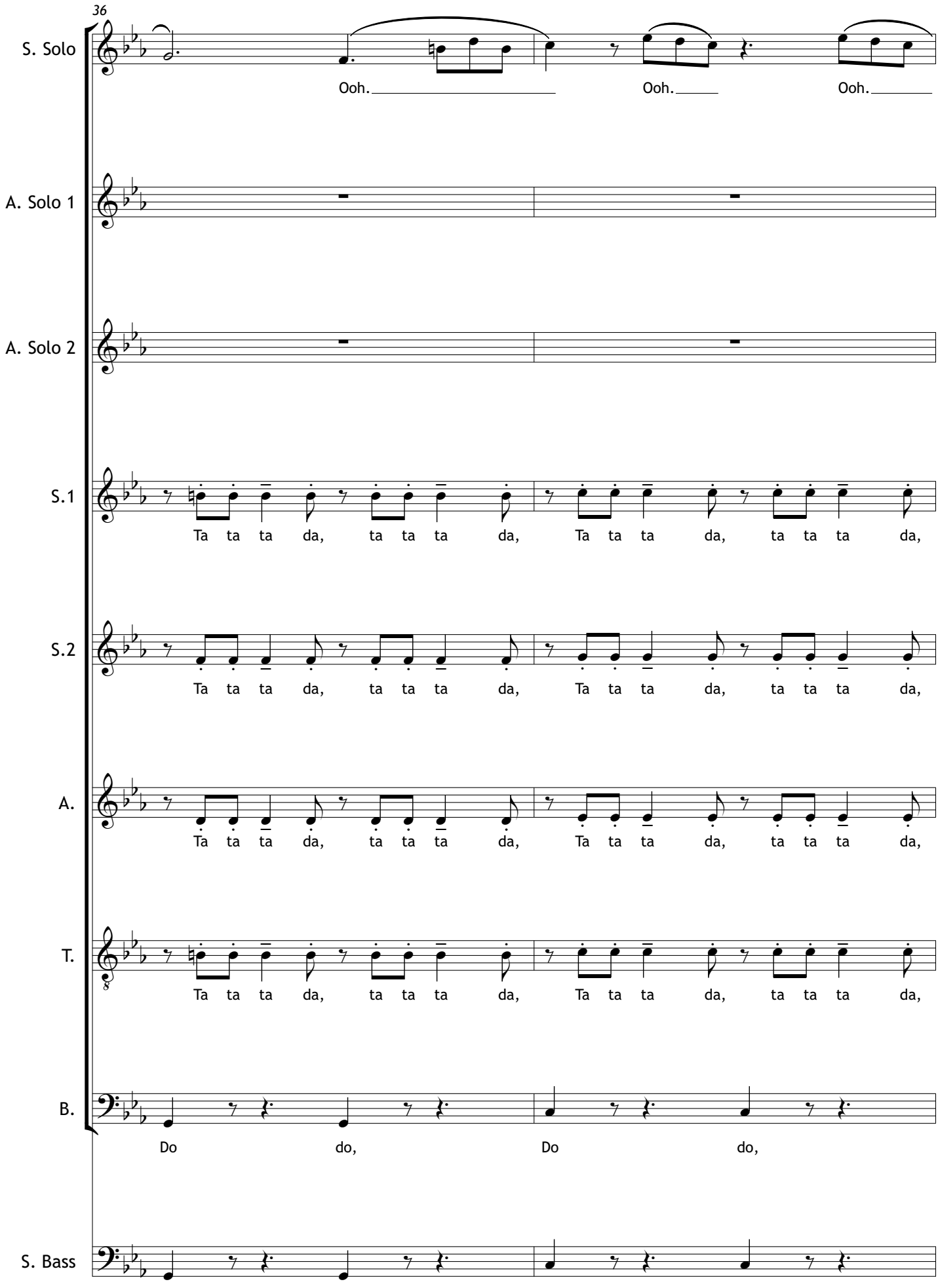

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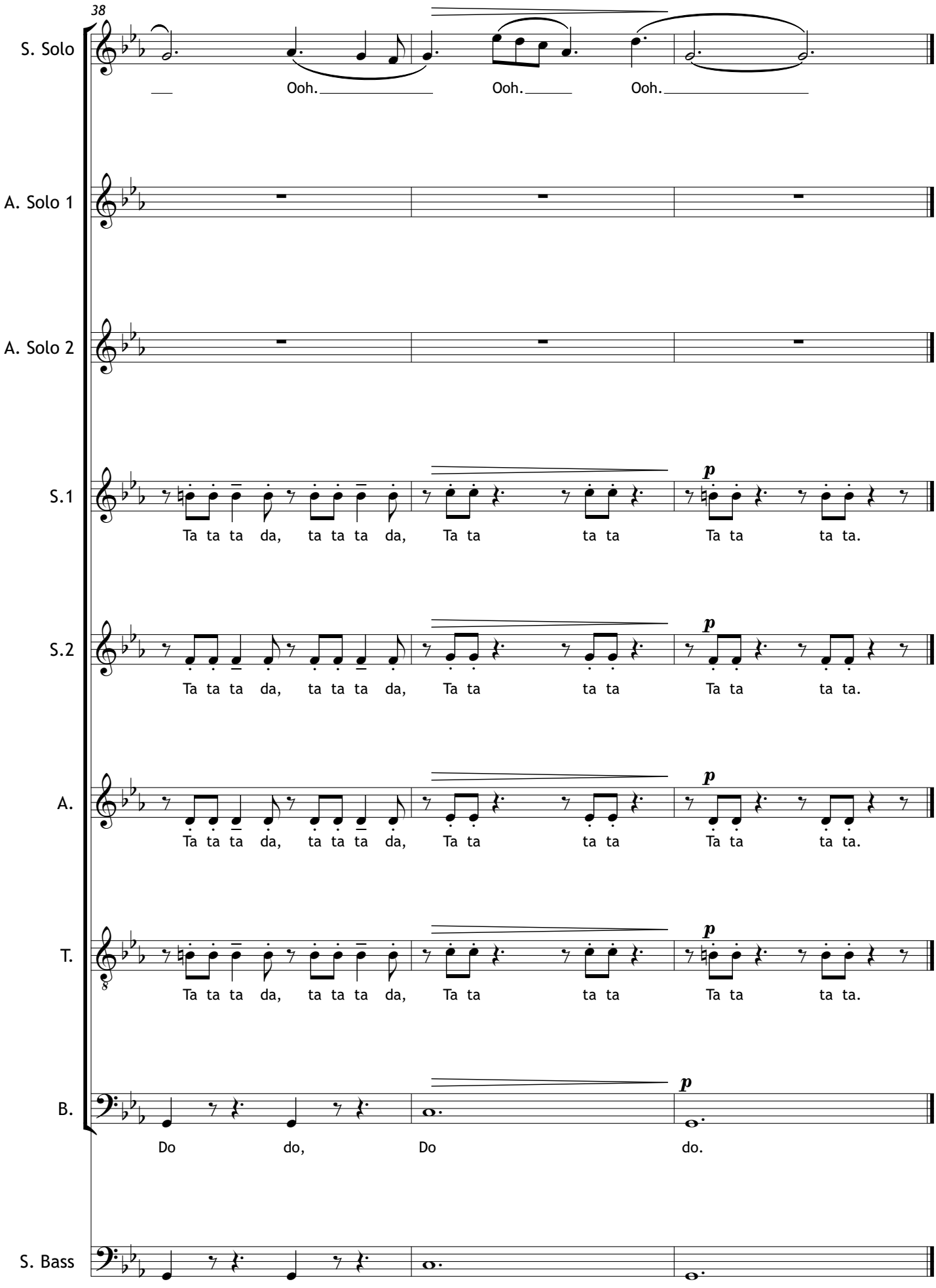

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Scripture

The final Item of *Tome of Stars* is *Scripture*. Here, the narrative arc is abandoned and instead what is presented is a steady-state consecration of the poet's unrequited love. Delusional but undimmed devotional feeling is transformed into liturgy.

Conceptualized from the perspective of a devotee of a cult of the Stargirl, it is written in language appropriate for such a religious acolyte. This devotee describes the cult's mythology, his personal mystical encounter with the Stargirl, and the aftermath of how it shaped his life.

Of course, this is working at a second level beyond the superficial vehicle of this personal spiritual narrative. The man is clearly more generally a proxy for the poet, his religious devotion a metaphor for the poet's emotional commitment, and the religious experience of encountering this cosmic force, both the heaven of it and the hell of losing it, is directly reflective of the poet's personal emotional journey and the transformative impact of the beloved on his life.

The transition from disoriented heartbreak to the last poems is a liturgical transformation of unrequited love, a ritual needed to express devotion when the object of adoration was not present and never would be.

Note: The first three songs are not from the Item *Scripture* in *Tome of Stars*, but from companion books or, in the case of *On a Pincushion*, from *Item 2: Senescence*. This is a compromise in compiling the choral songs (from nearly 200 songs in many genres) into one collection. The last three—*Polaris, Transfiguration, and Mangalam*—are taken directly from *Item 6: Scripture*.

13. Event Horizon

This is a versification of a horrific scene from one of the poet's decades-old novels, recounting the torture and transformation of a main character (he will not examine this too closely for fear of revealing the novel and identifying himself, which could lead to identifying others in the narrative). As with all the poems adapted from his novels in the *Tome of Stars* universe (including *Song of Solomon, False Dawn, Nested Wormholes*, *Atlantis*, *Heat Death*, *Base Case Reverie*, *First Sight*, *Divine Descent, She Blessed the Vaulted Skies, Event Horizon,* and *Dream 81277*), when he manically wrote these books in the deep shadow of the loss of his beloved, he did not realize that he was writing to and about her, as bizarre and unconnected as many elements of the stories appear to be to any real human life.

This adaptation of the novel scene anchors the a story symbolically in the realm of the poet's flawed personality and how it murdered the Stargirl's love for him. The black hole in this (uni) verse is both the poet and the collapse of the bond with the beloved. The poet is cast as inherently, deeply, pathologically ruined (echoing *Once upon a Time, Part 1*), with *"Crazed cancers rooted deep and ages bred"* becoming a *"widening maw"* that feasts and tortures the Stargirl until she fails and *"falls"*, her love and commitment to him breaking under the weight of his corrupted nature.

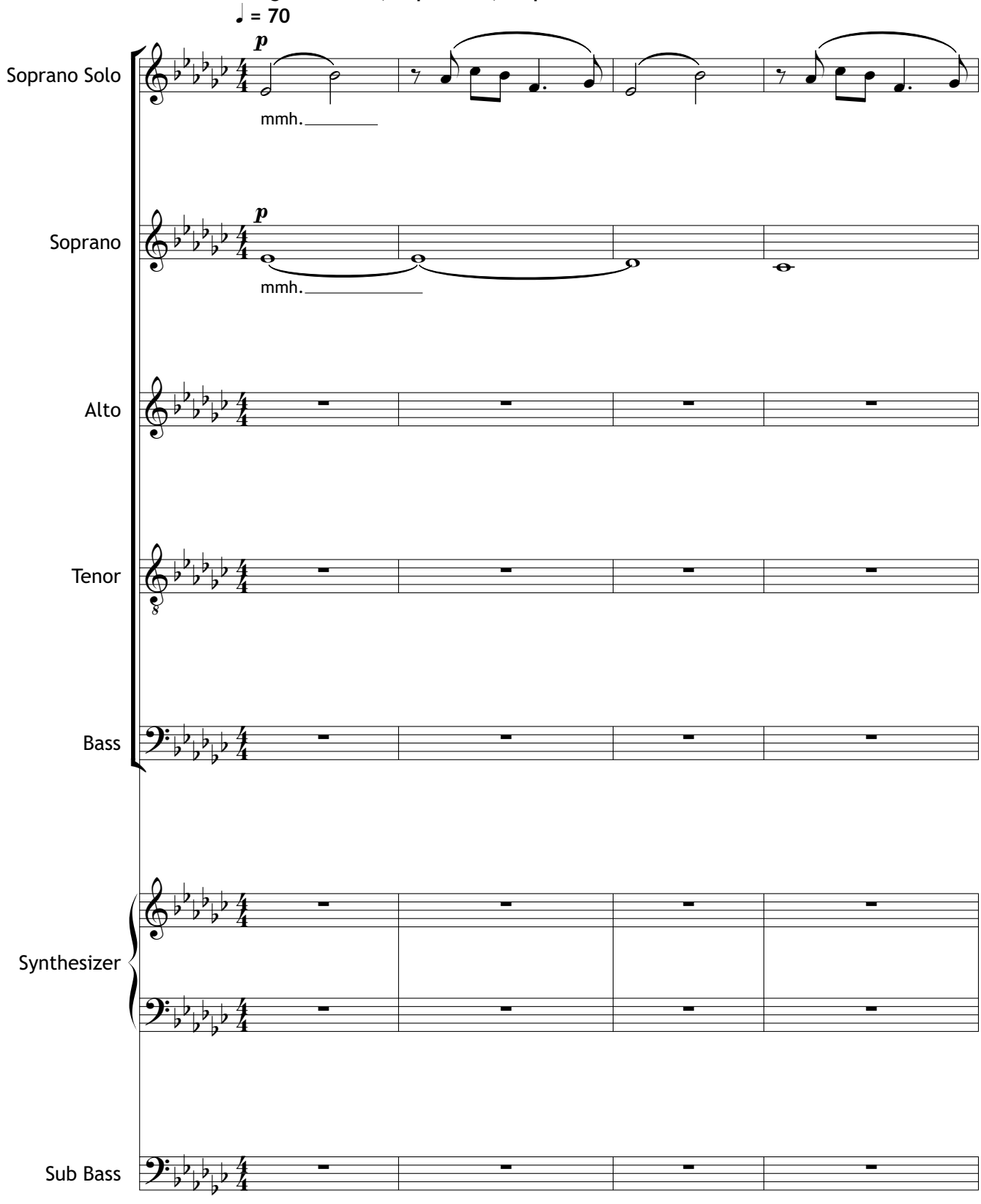
And so he loses her, *"the only light I understood/Collapsing star consuming every good."* More than any other poem, especially in combination with the music, *Event Horizon* captures the raw essence of the unmaking loss of the Stargirl for the poet. There is nothing left in the universe, only collapse, darkness, and isolation.

Event Horizon

In Darkness and in Light: a "Tome of Stars" Companion

Stargazer

Vocal Ensemble



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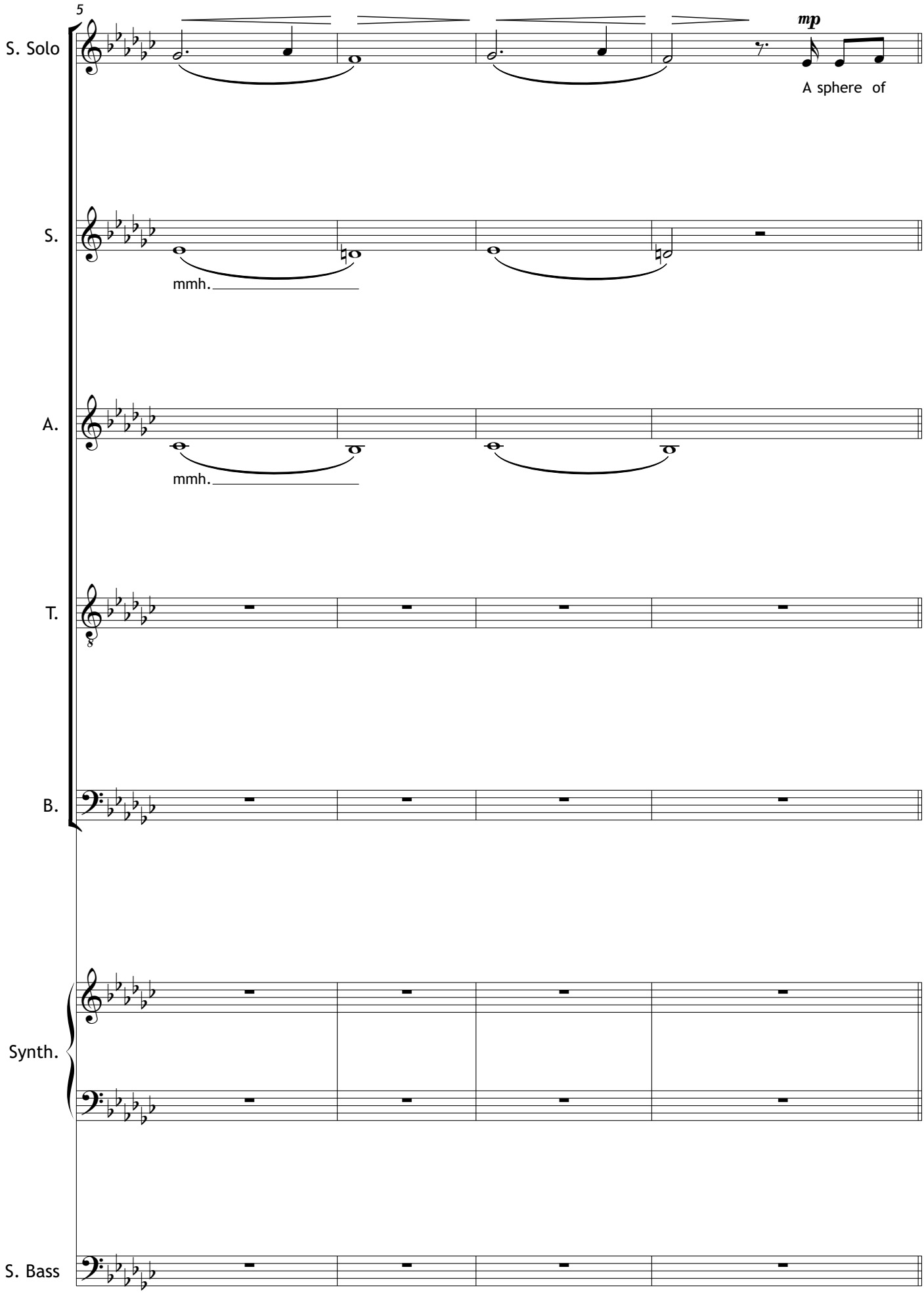

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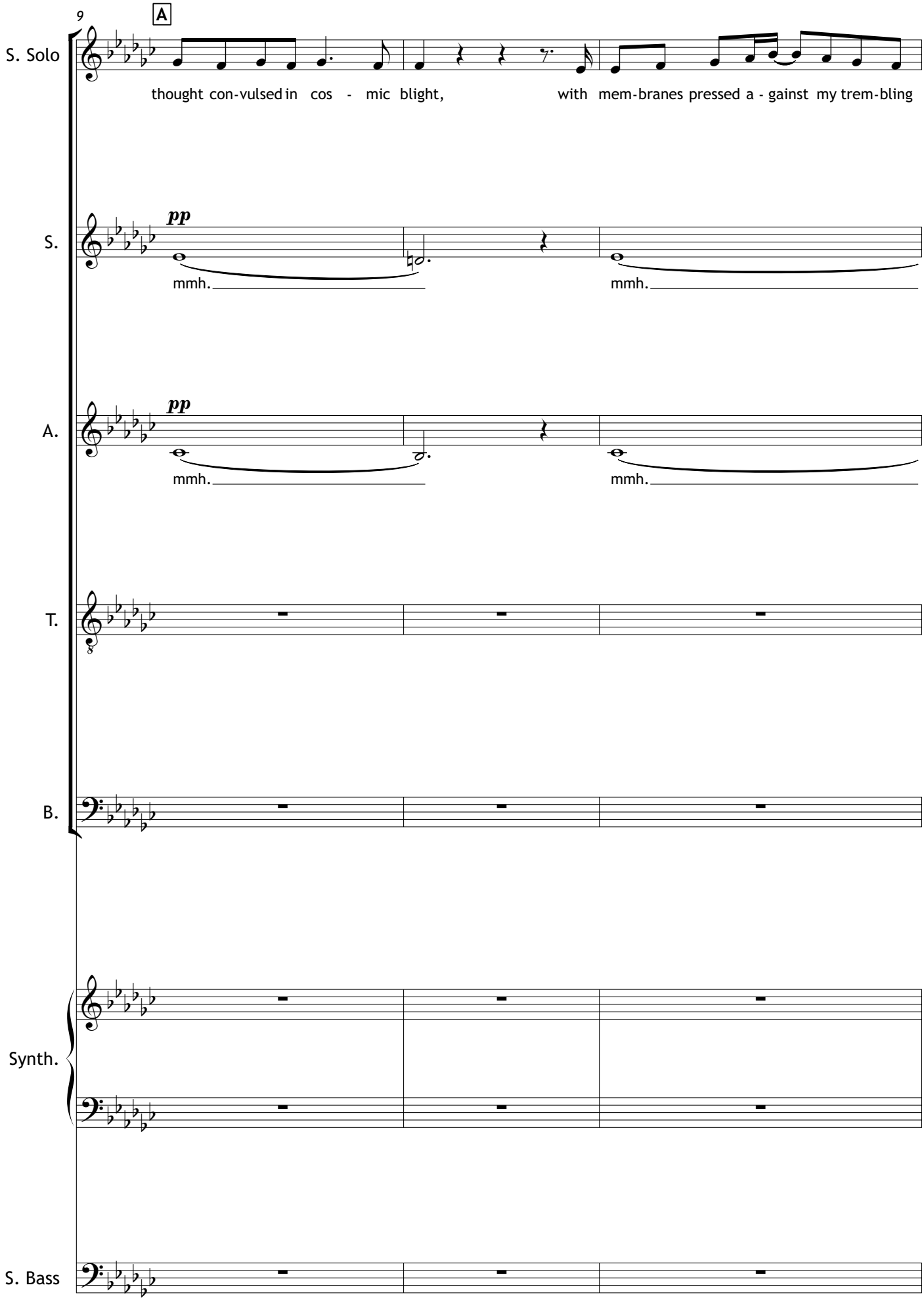

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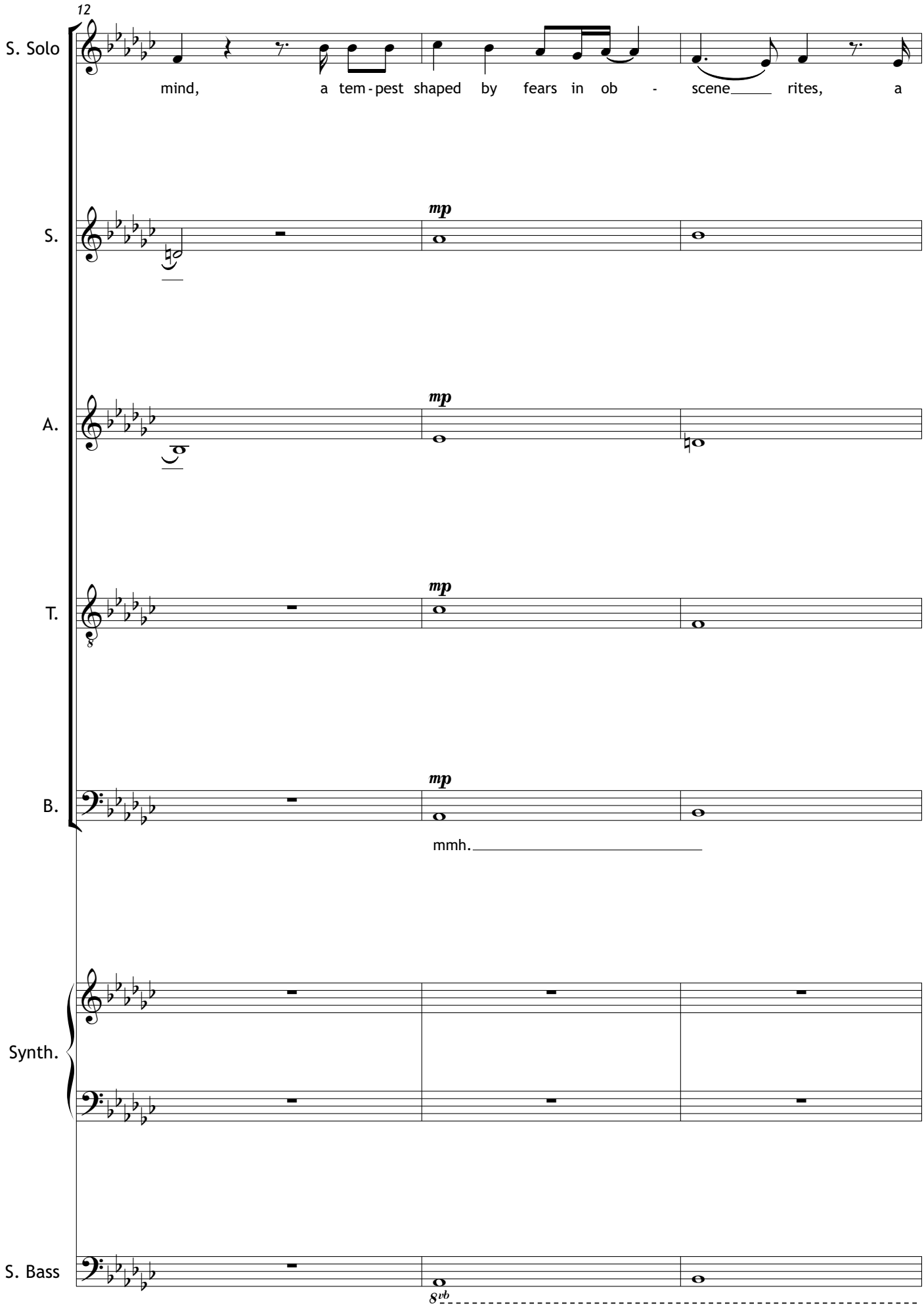

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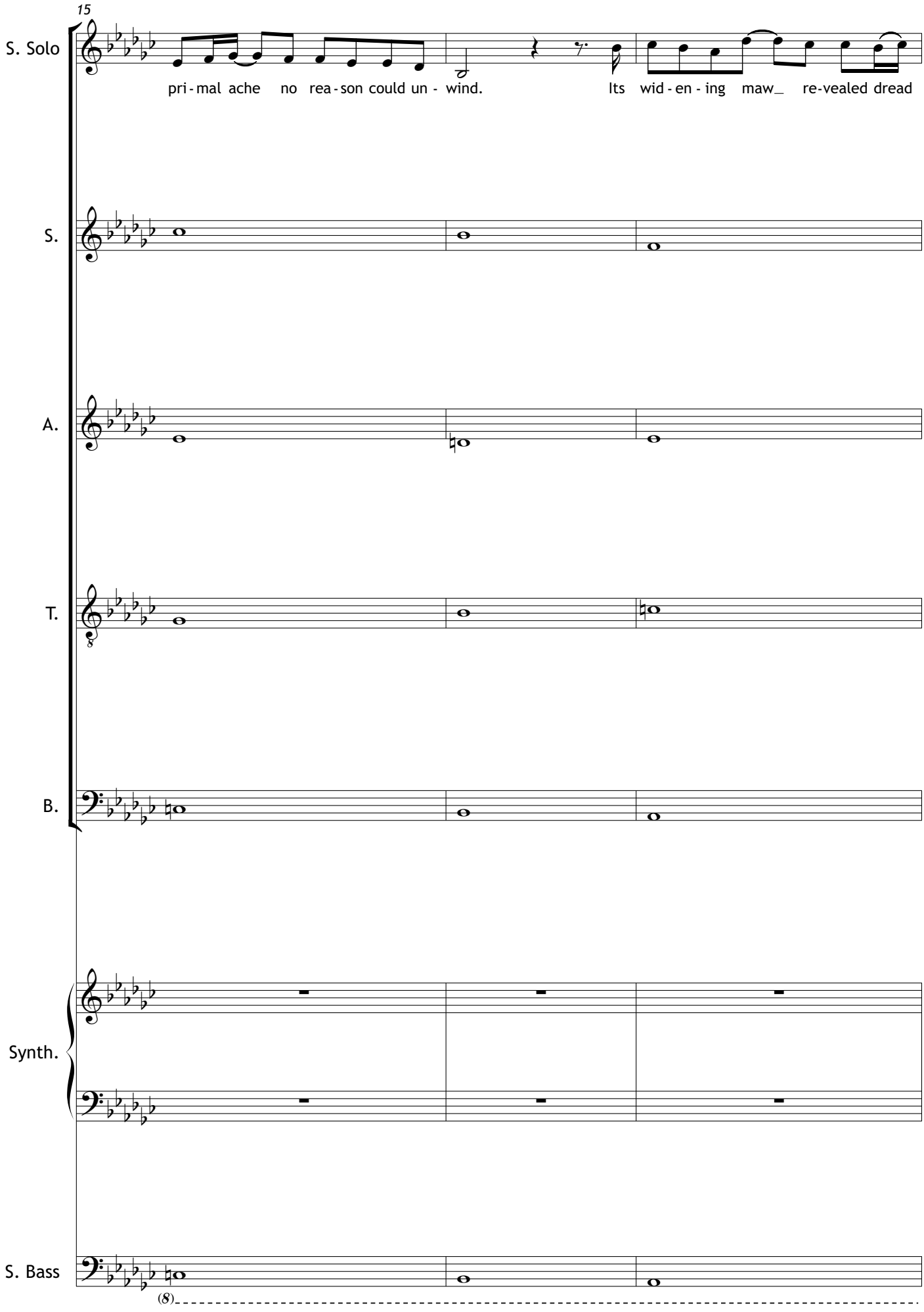

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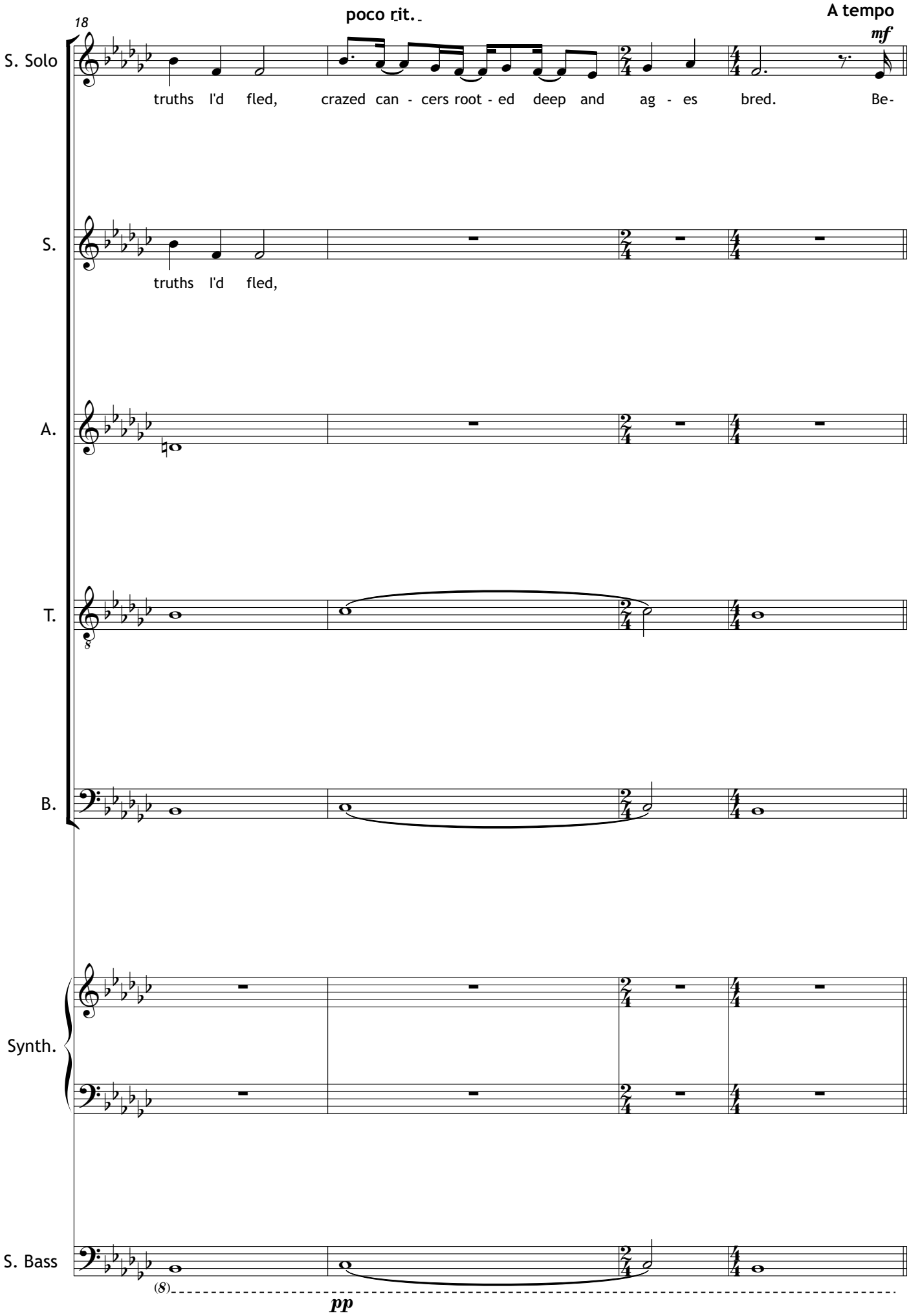

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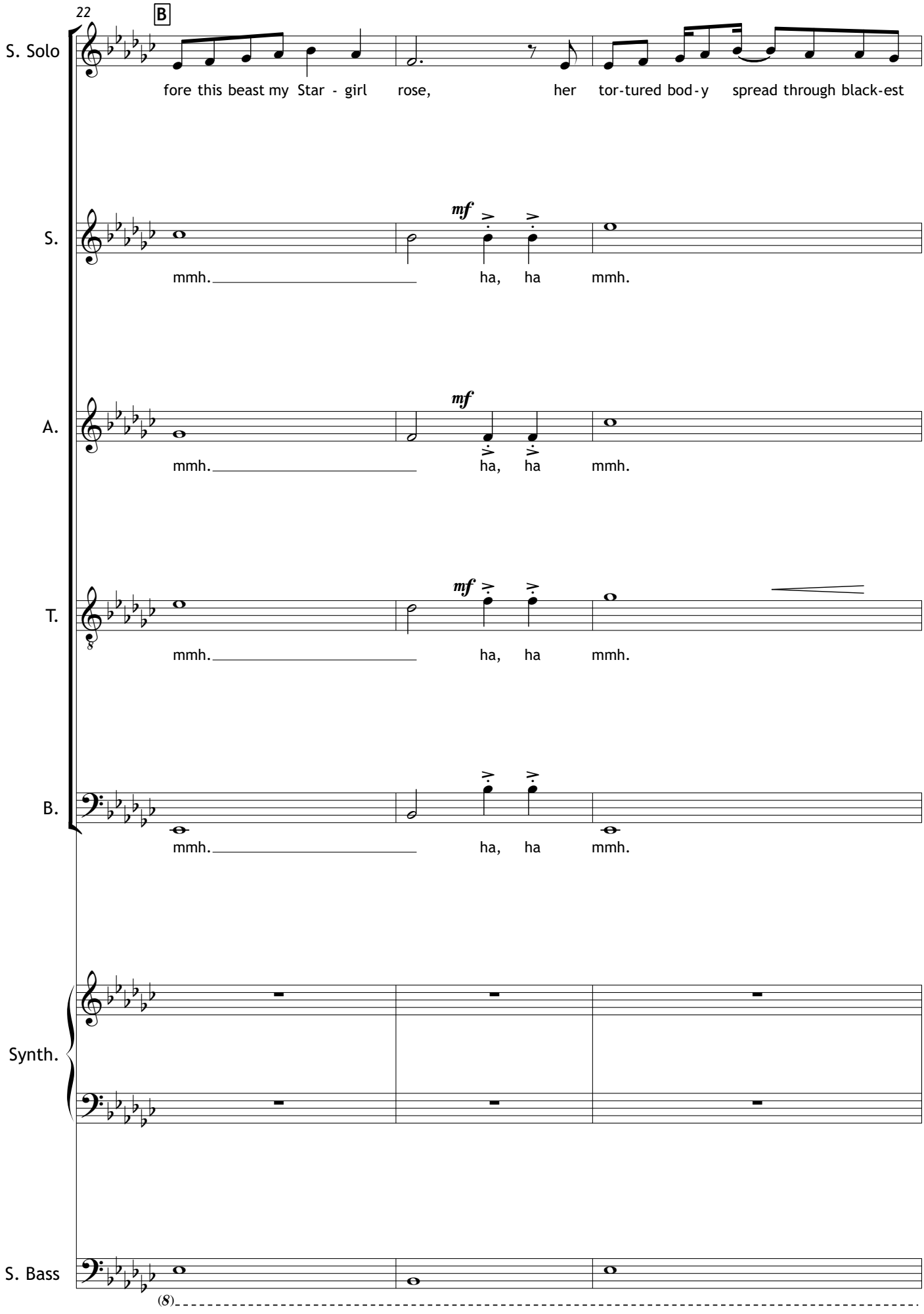

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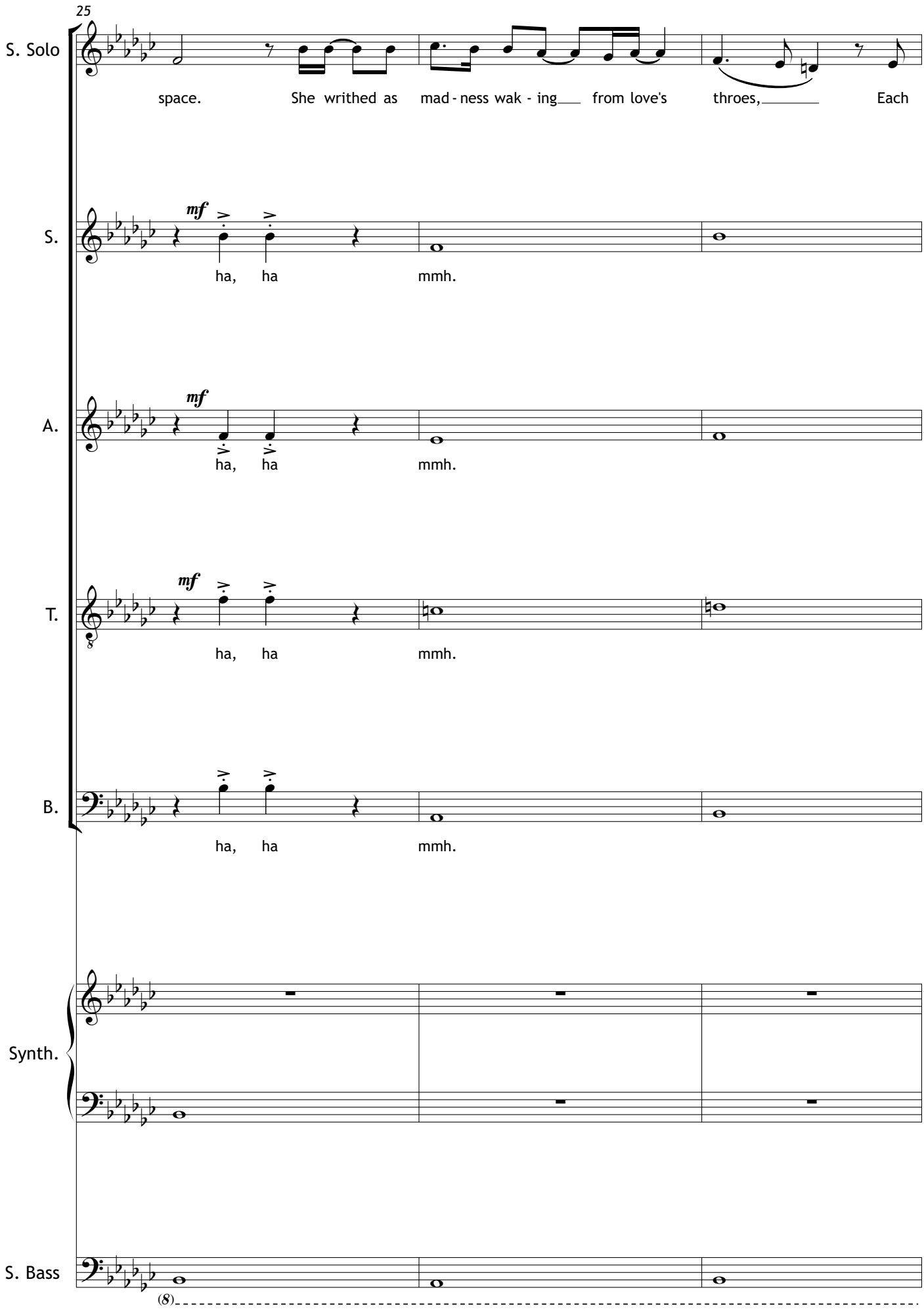

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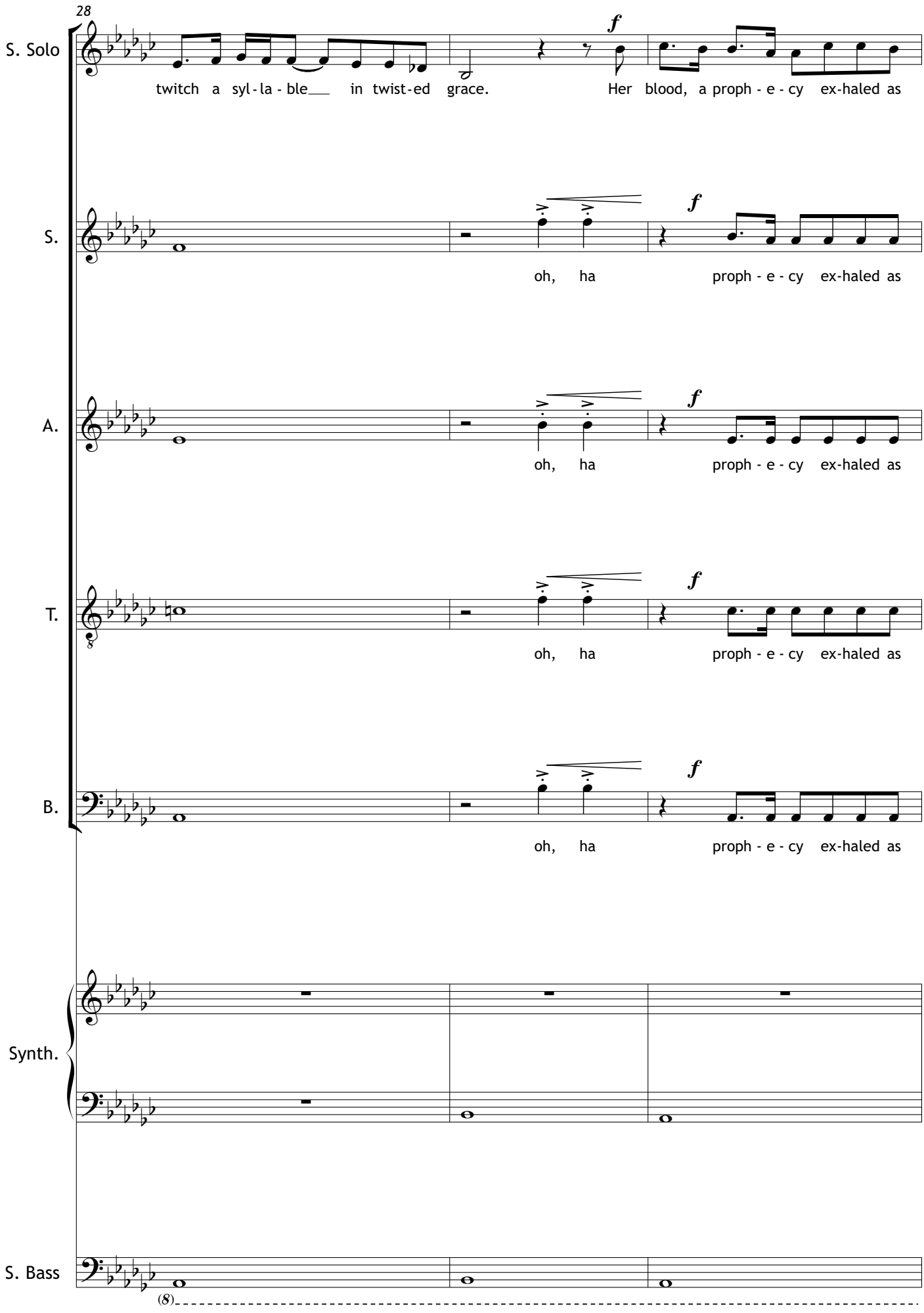

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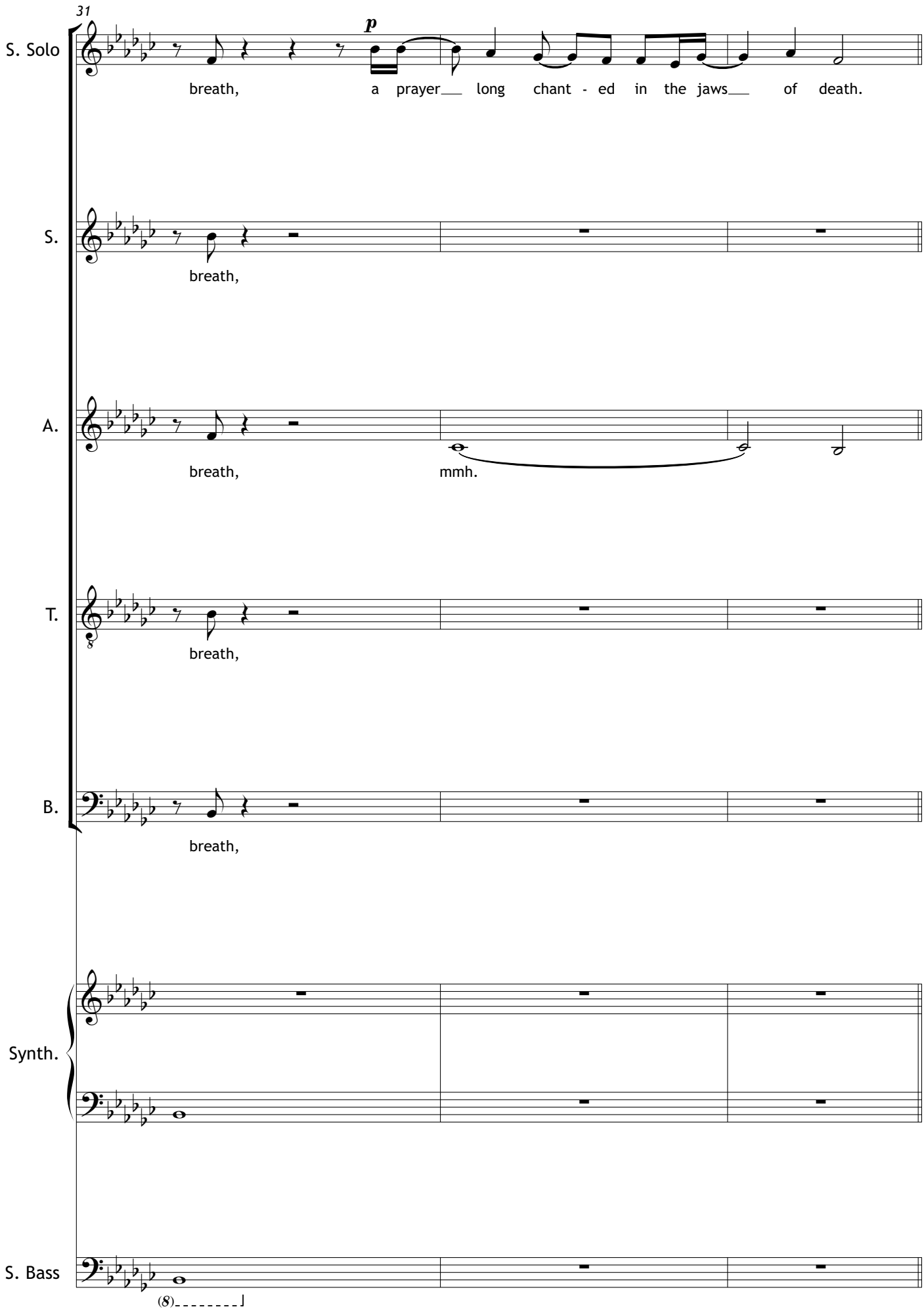

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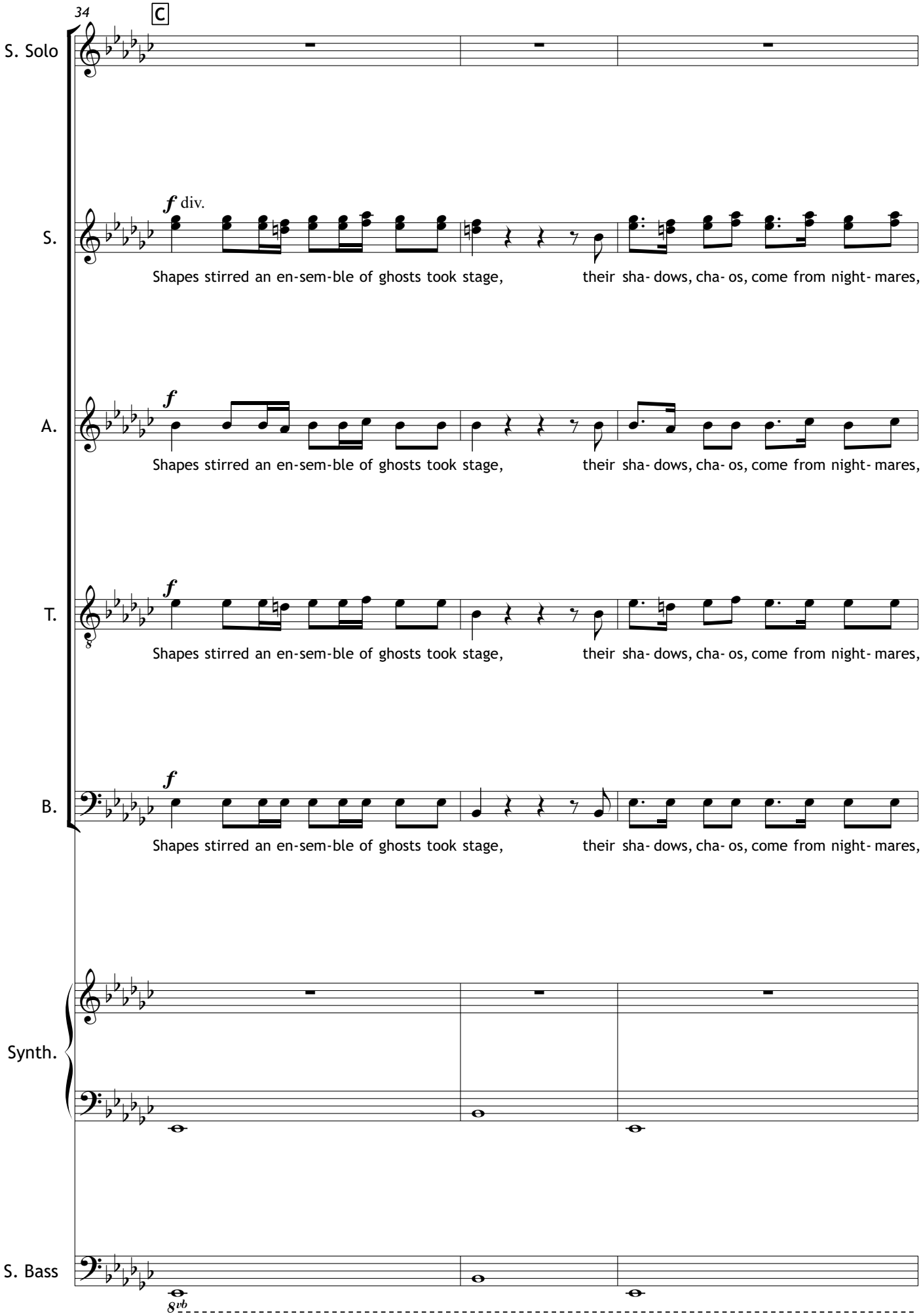

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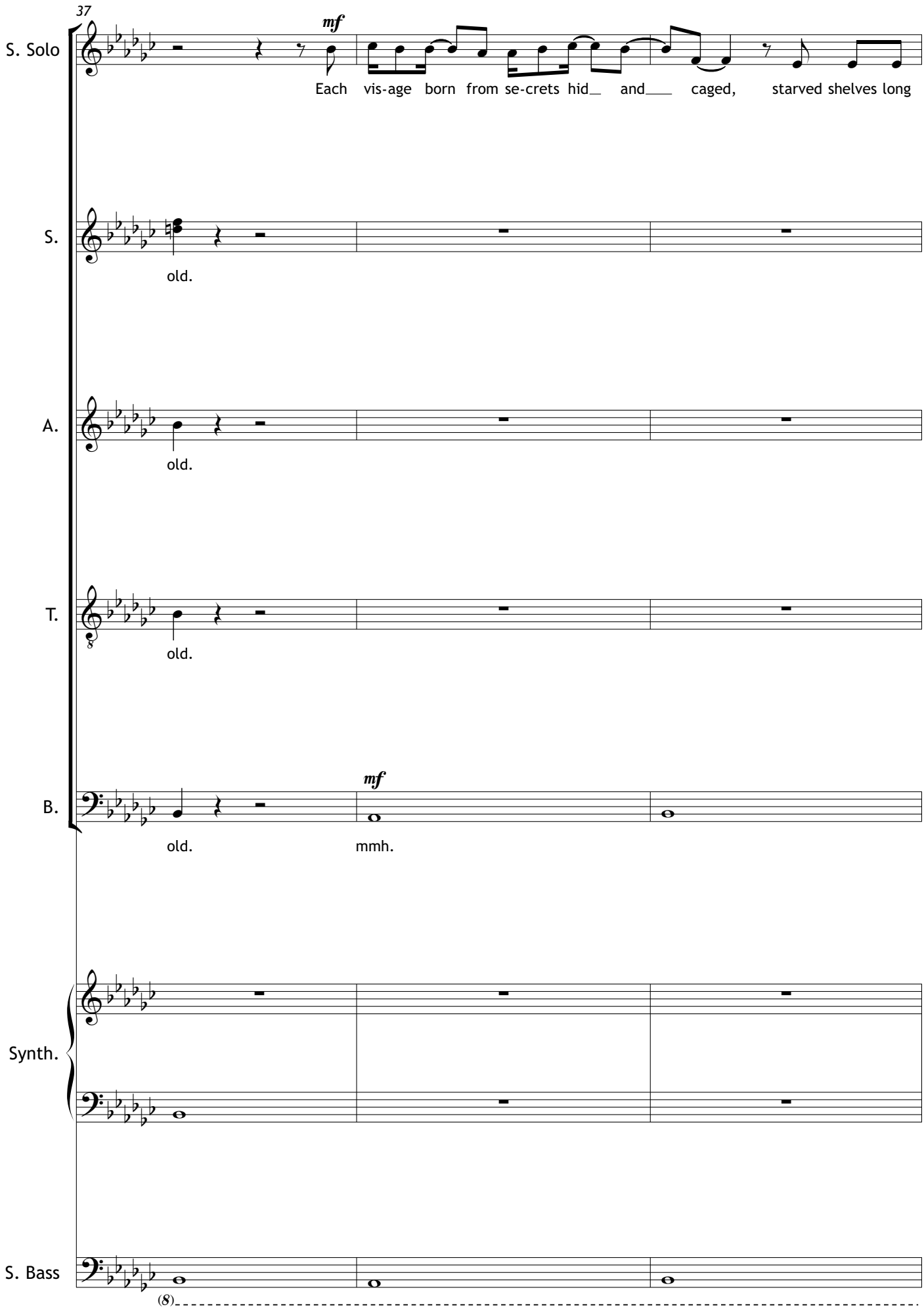

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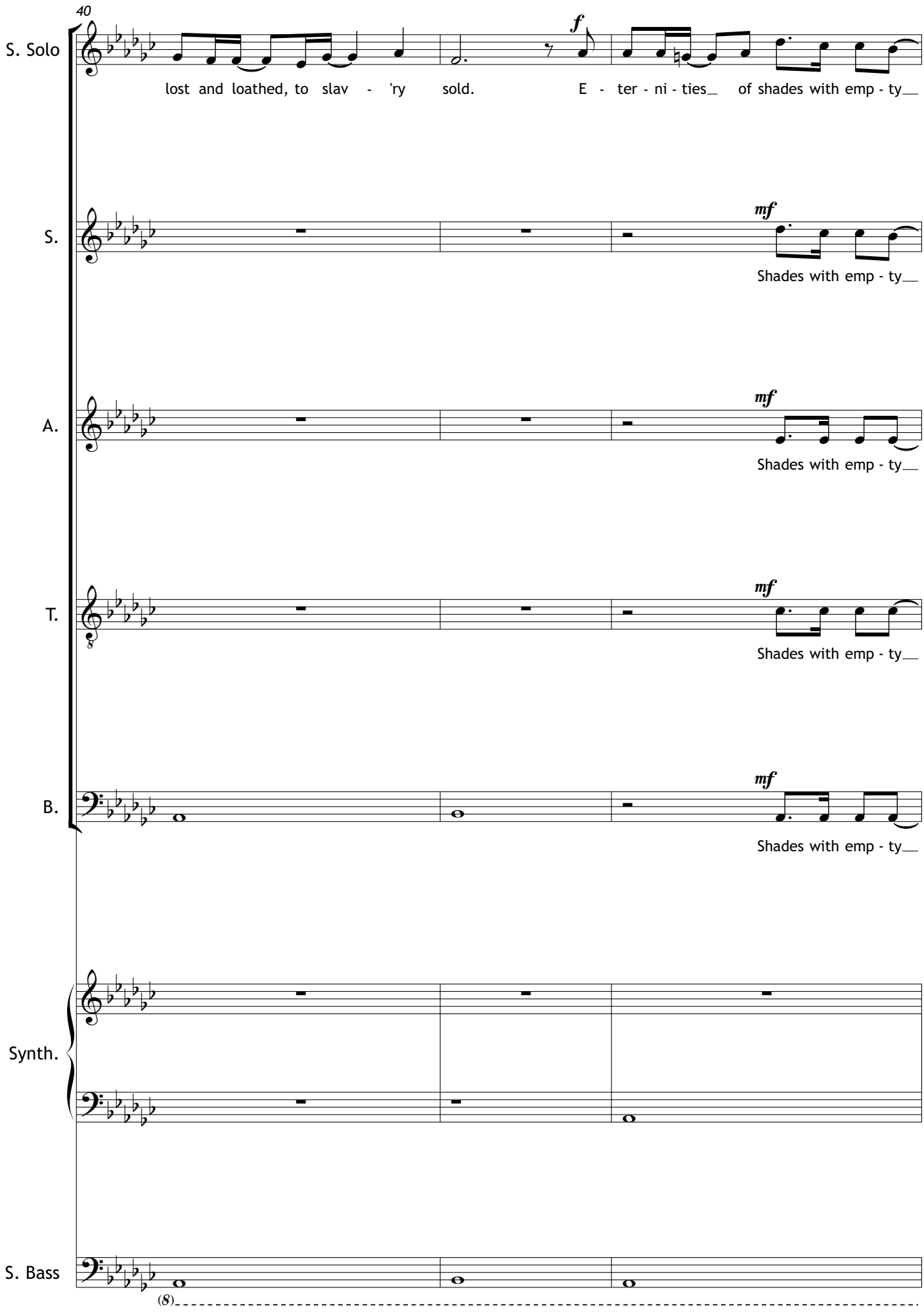

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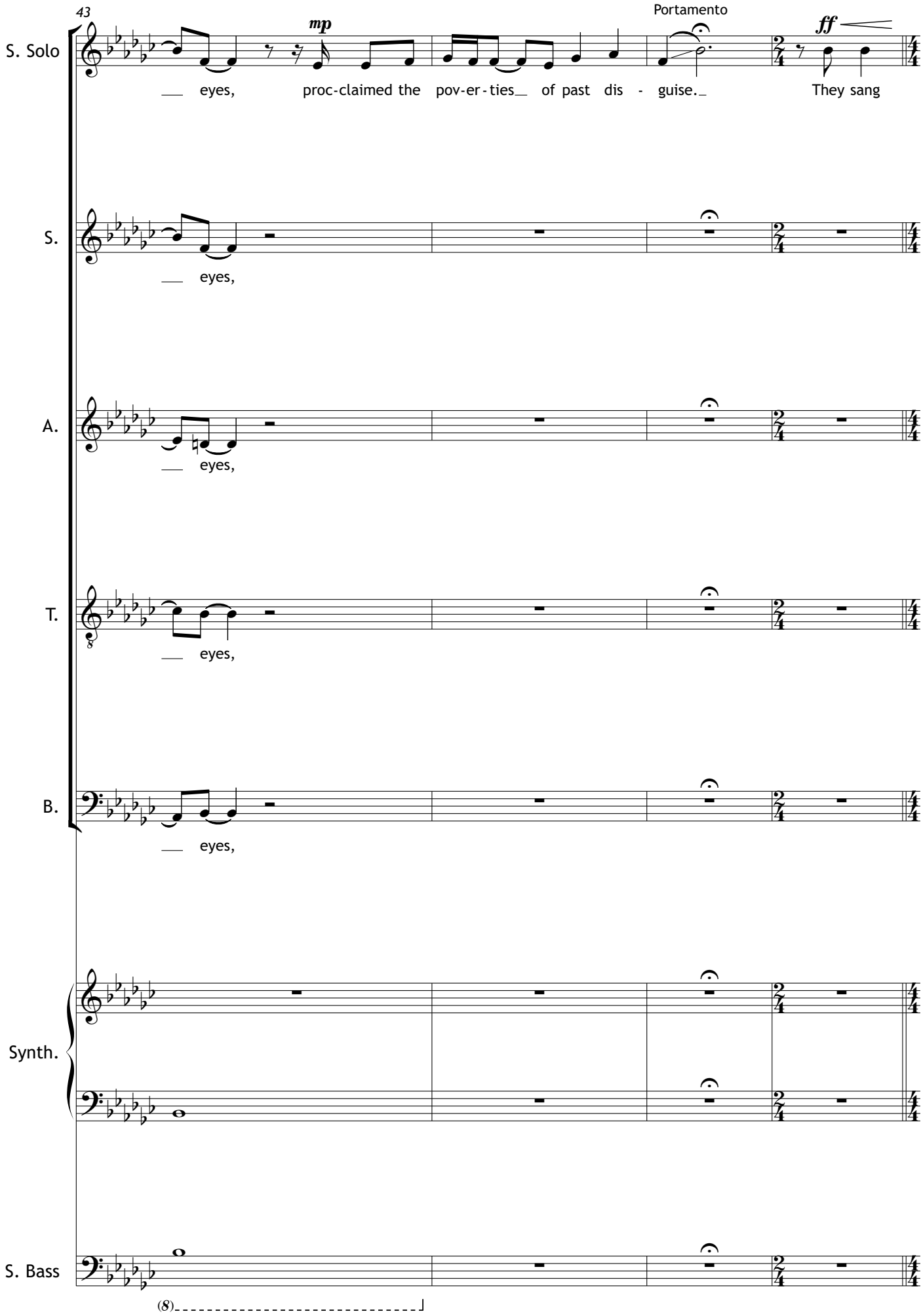

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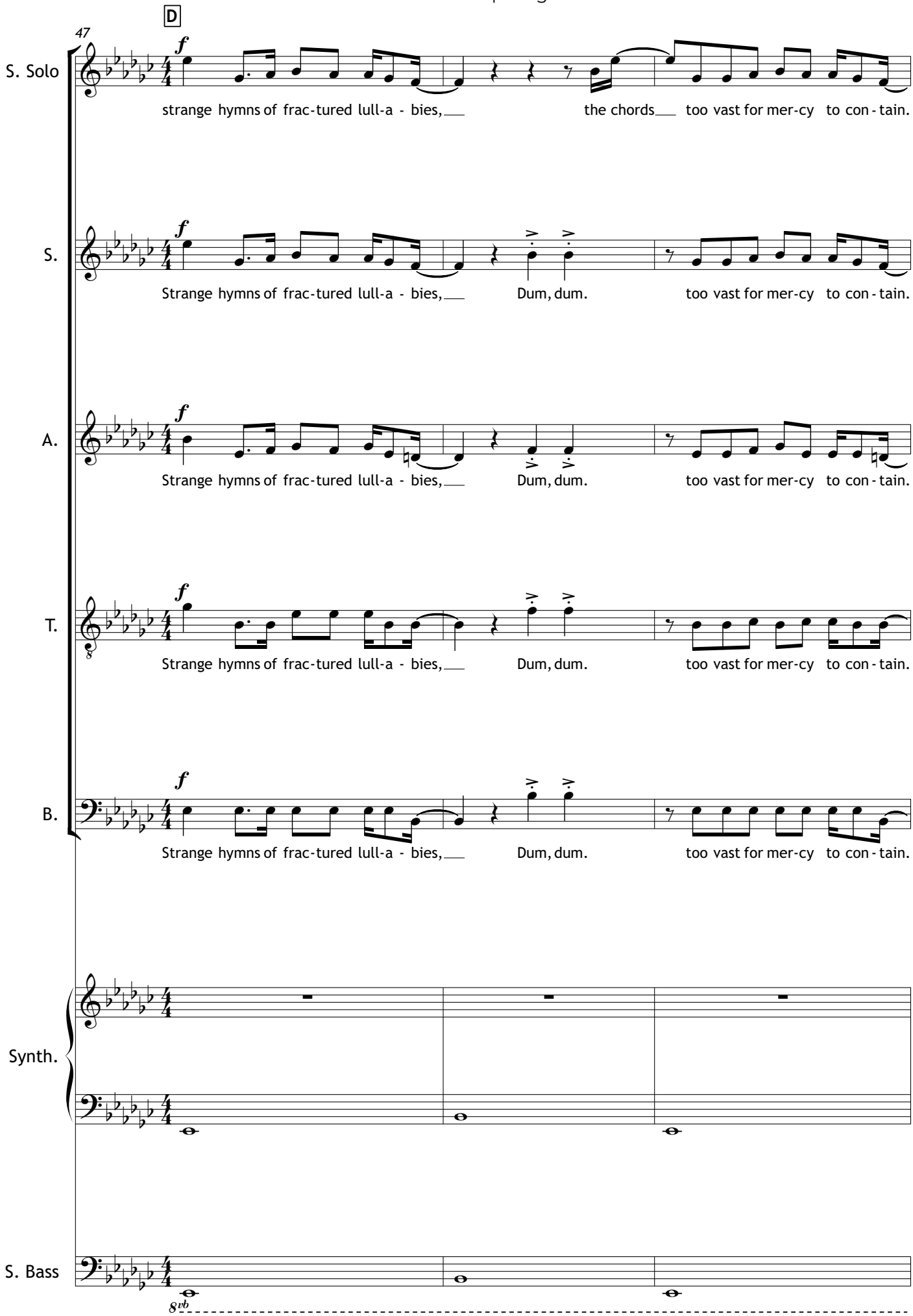

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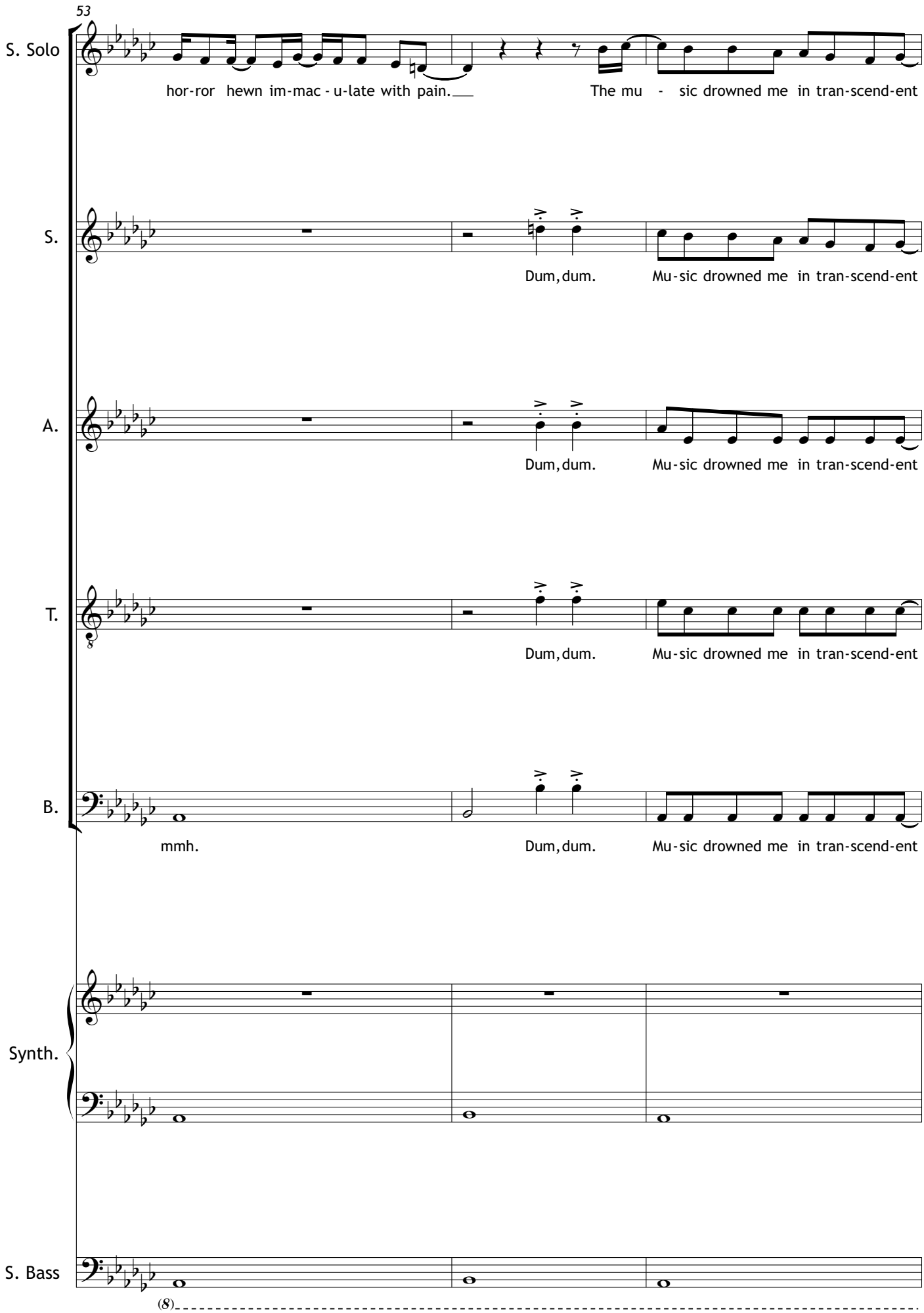

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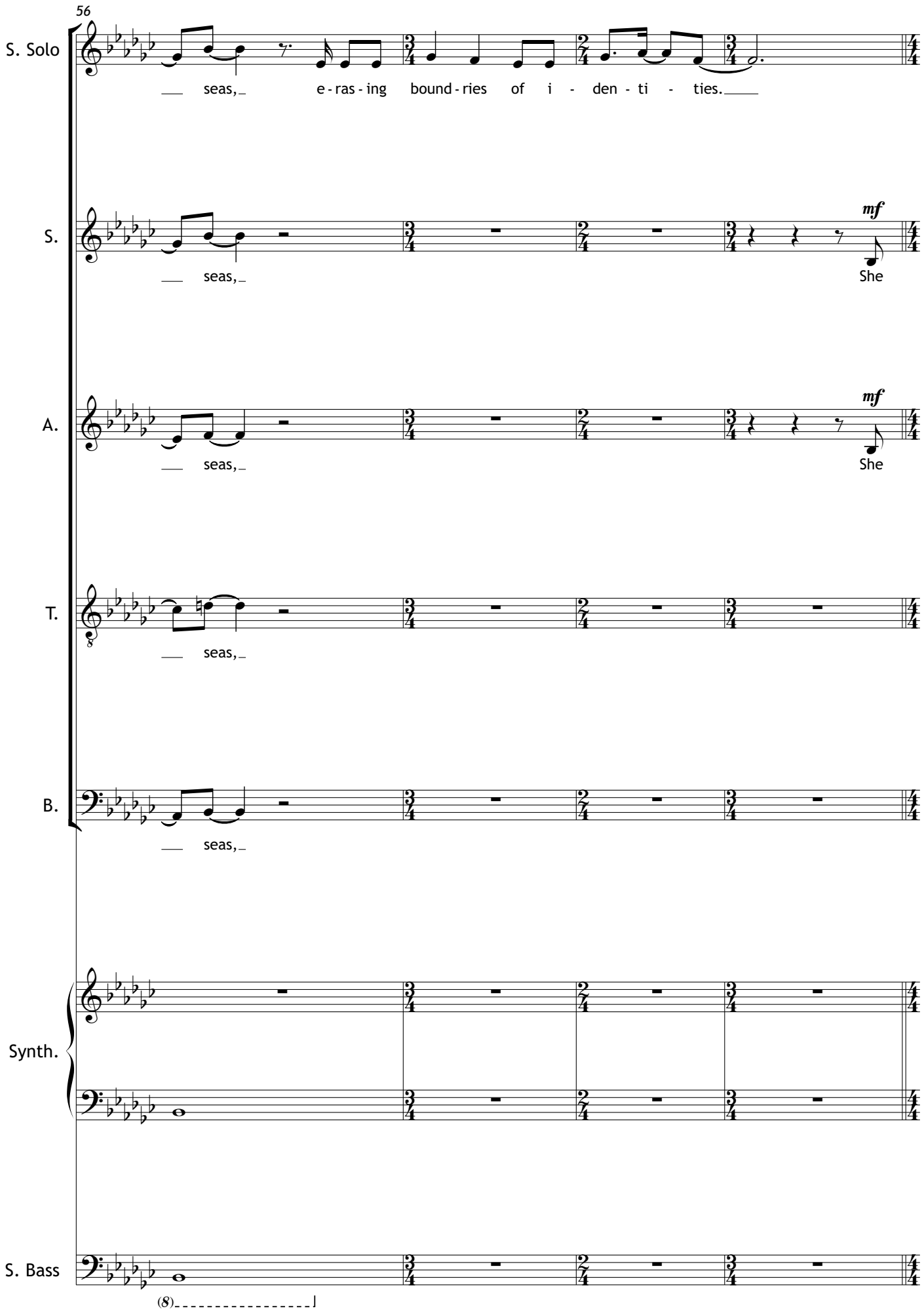

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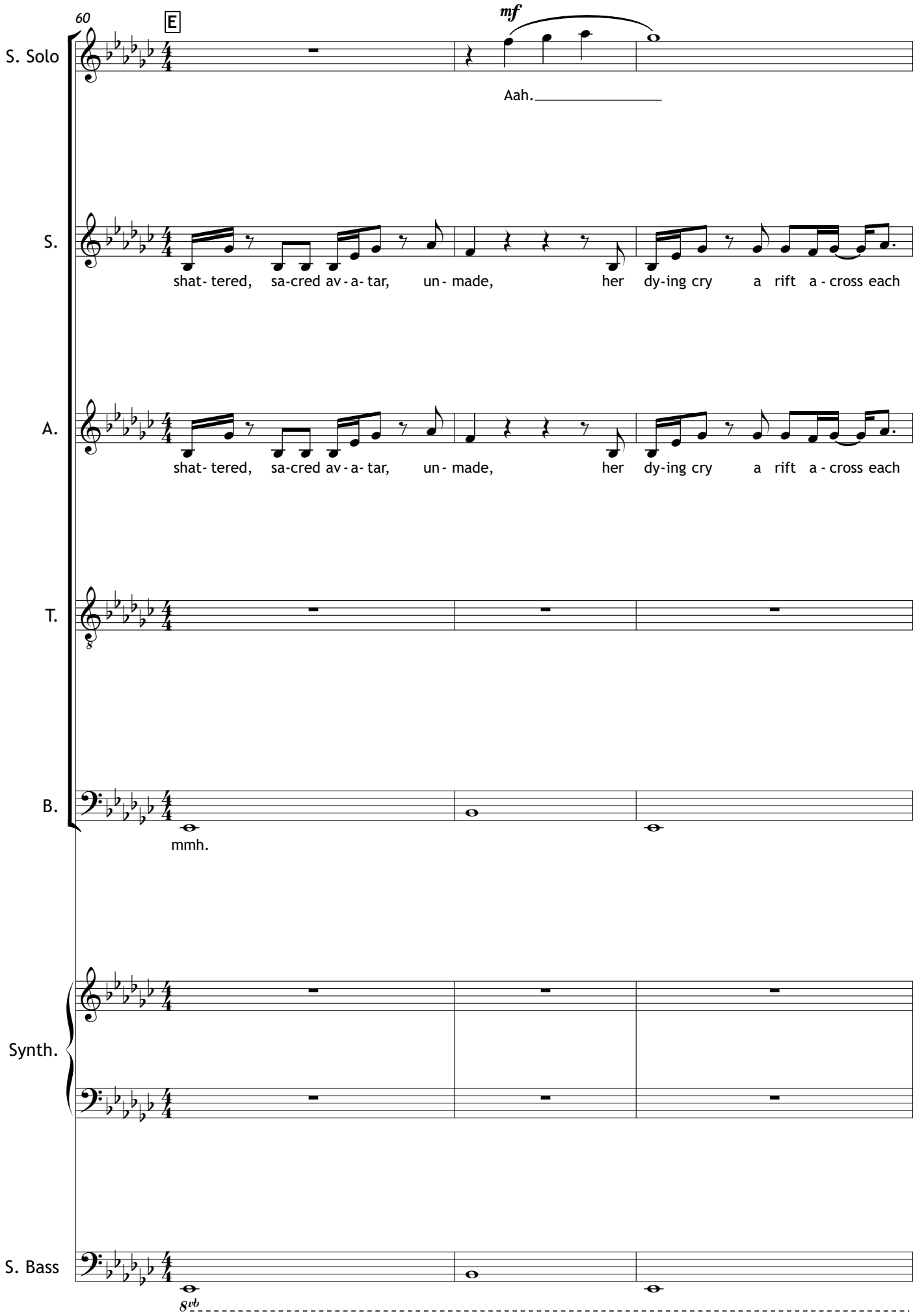

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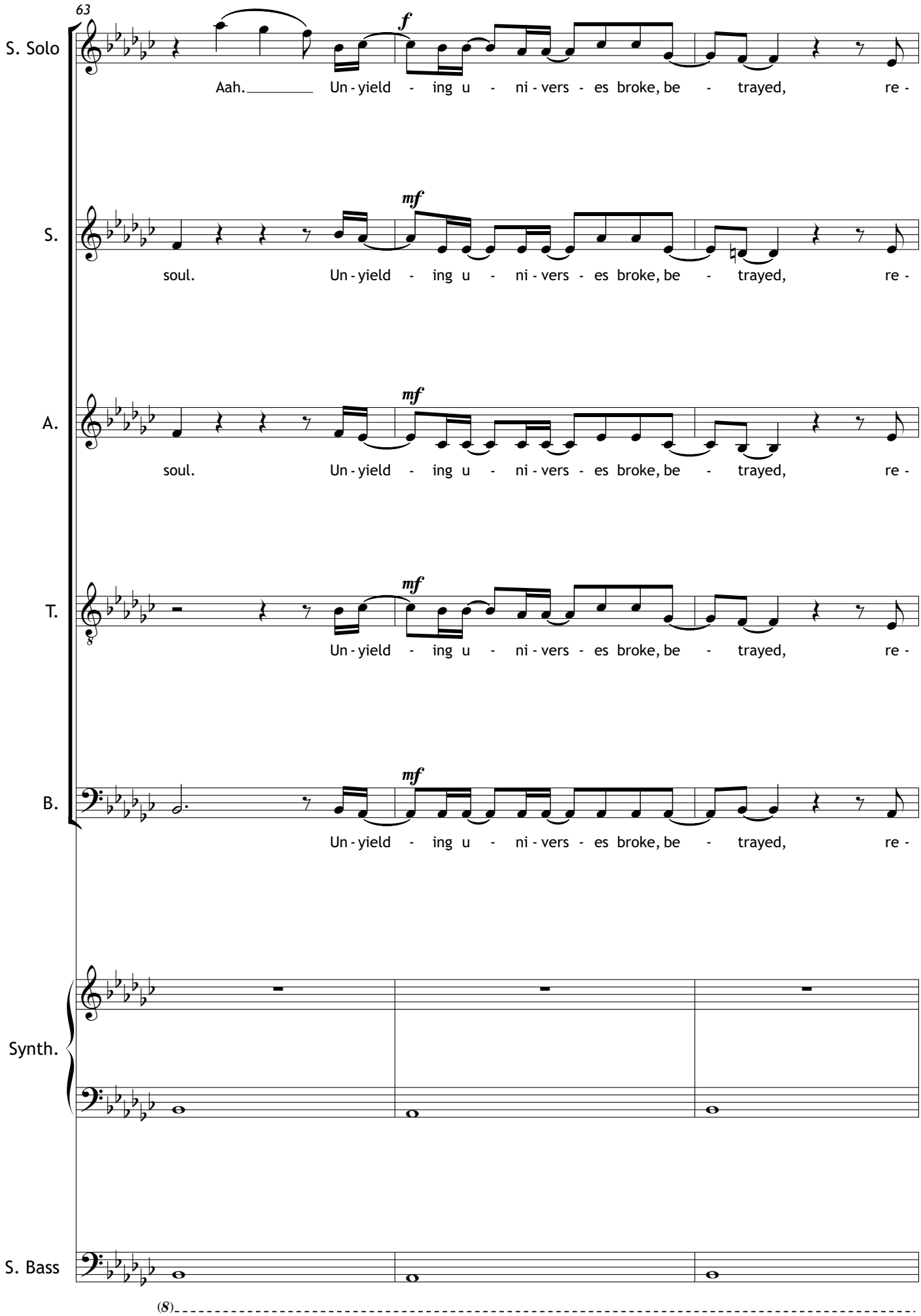

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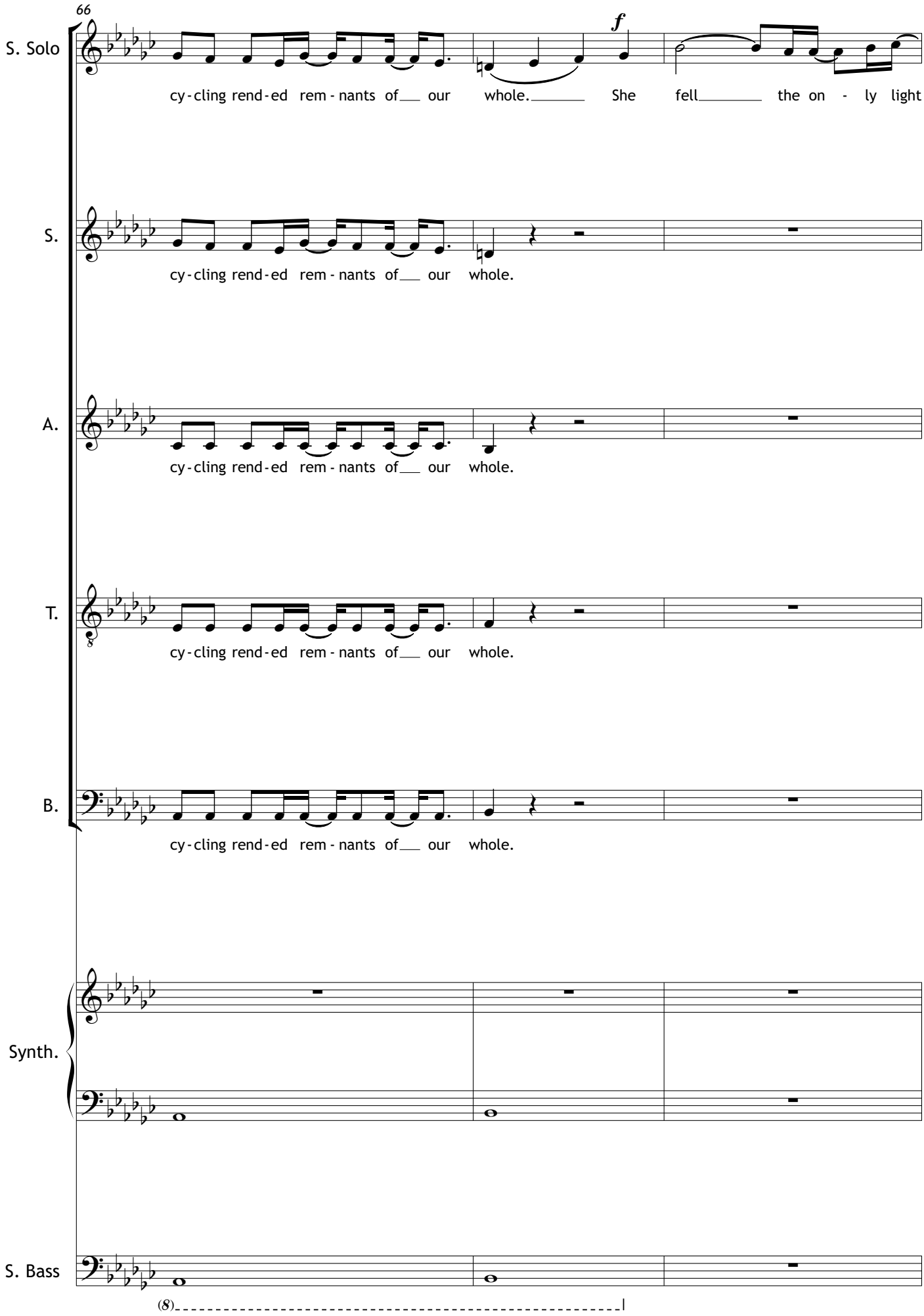

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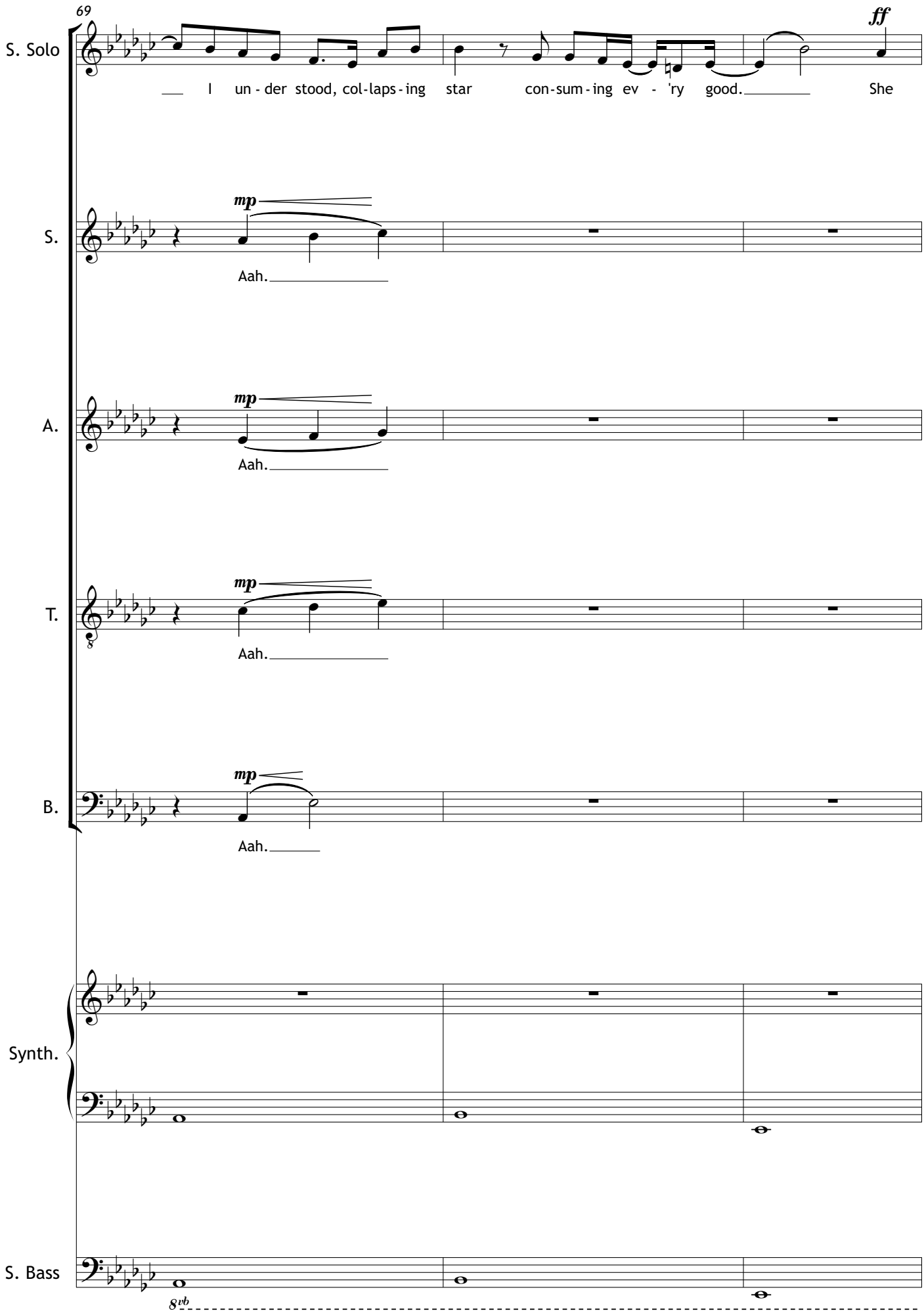

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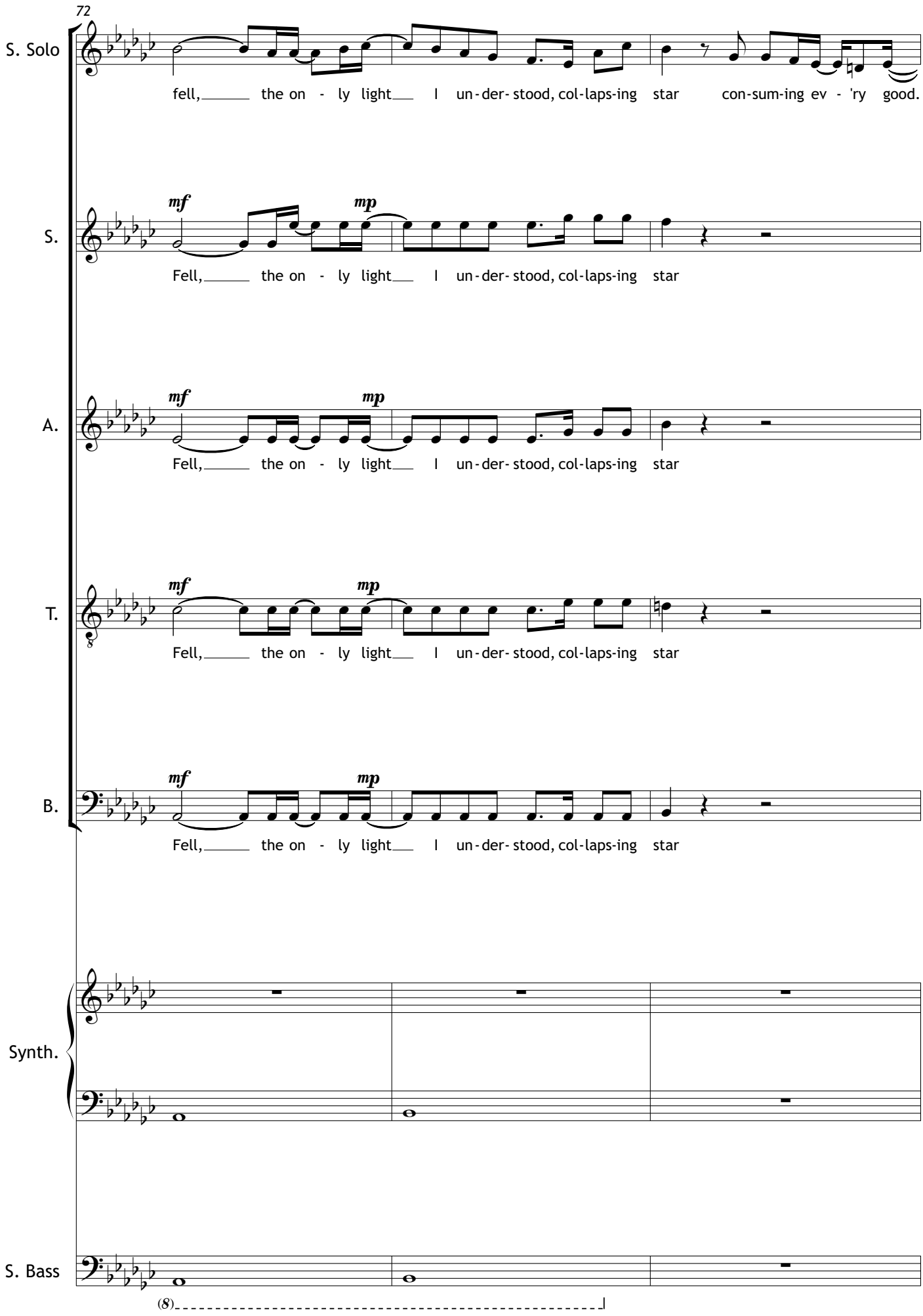

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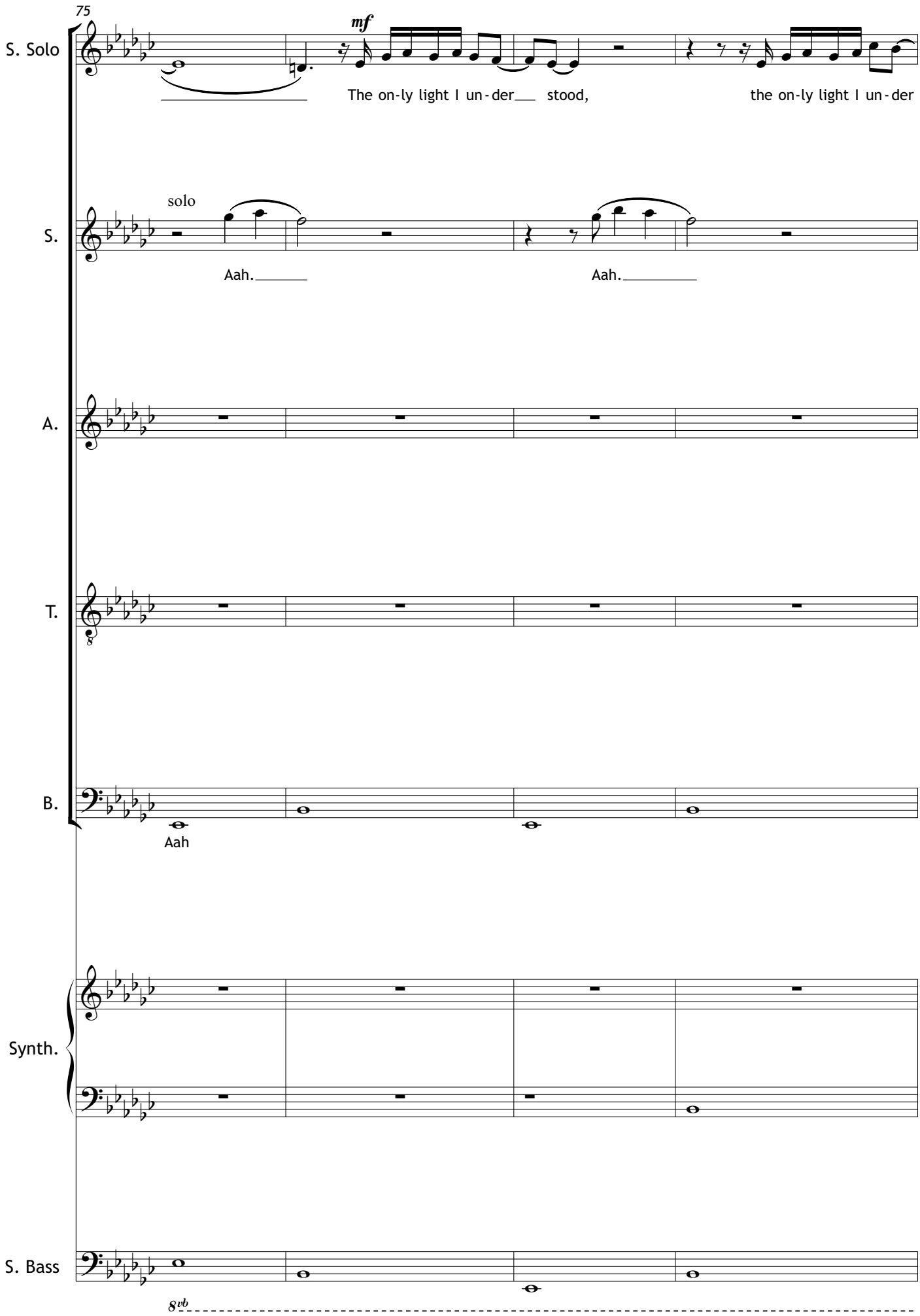

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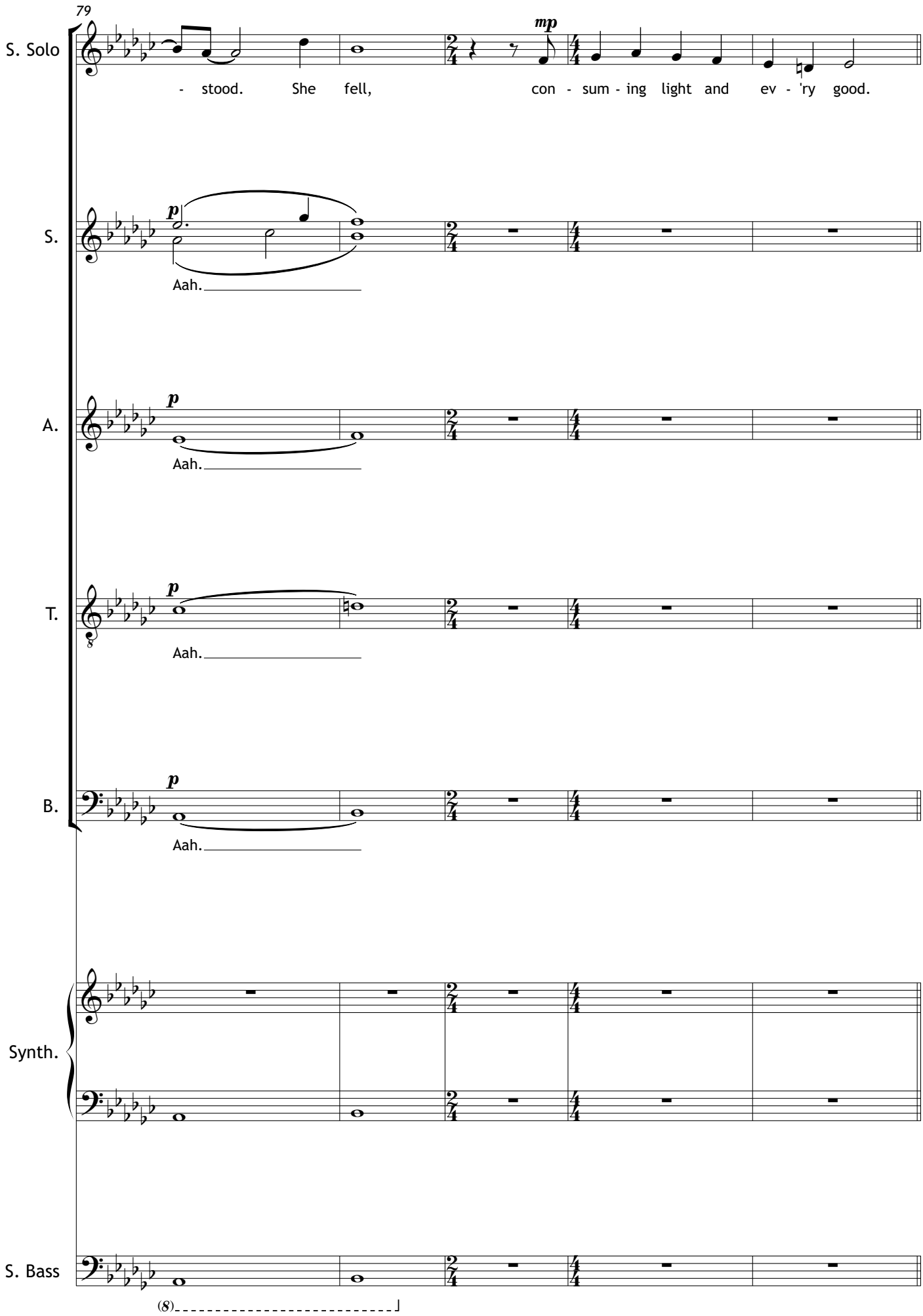

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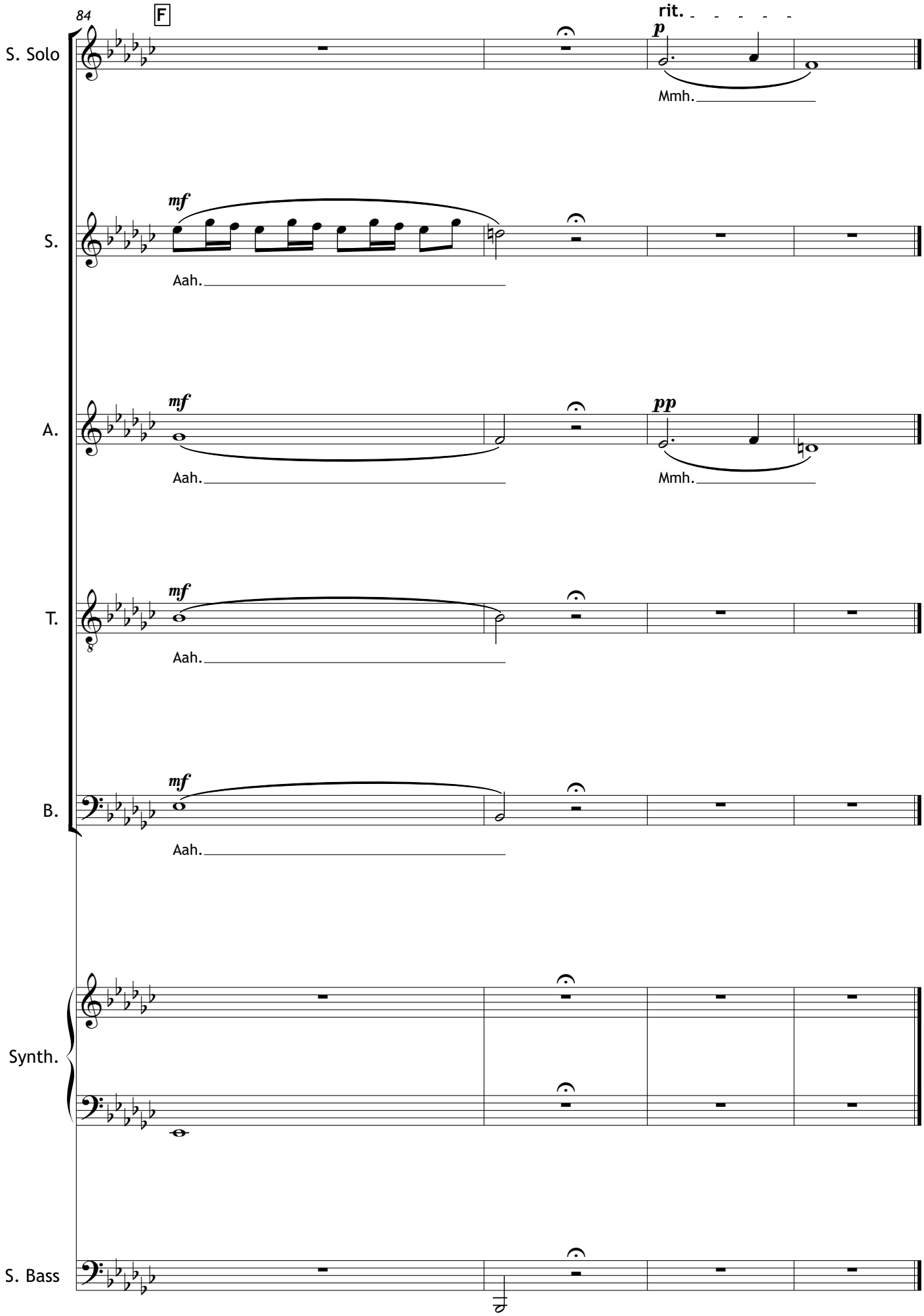

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14. On a Pincushion

This sonnet retells the fairy tale of Princess Pyra and Prince Fluvius. They are characters from a story in a collection of tales by Mary De Morgan called "On a Pincushion". Pyra is a fire fairy and Fluvius a water prince, and although they fell in love, their natures and political circumstances made it impossible for them to be together: "*For flame and water, each annihilate.*"

They find a solution to this conundrum of annihilation, paradoxically, but risking their destruction. By joining, they are reborn, their previous natures remade, rendering them two different creatures that can be together. Instead of obliteration, they find transformation.

Once upon a time, the beloved told the poet this story, convinced that it mirrored the impossibility of their own union, hoping that they could transcend those difficulties.

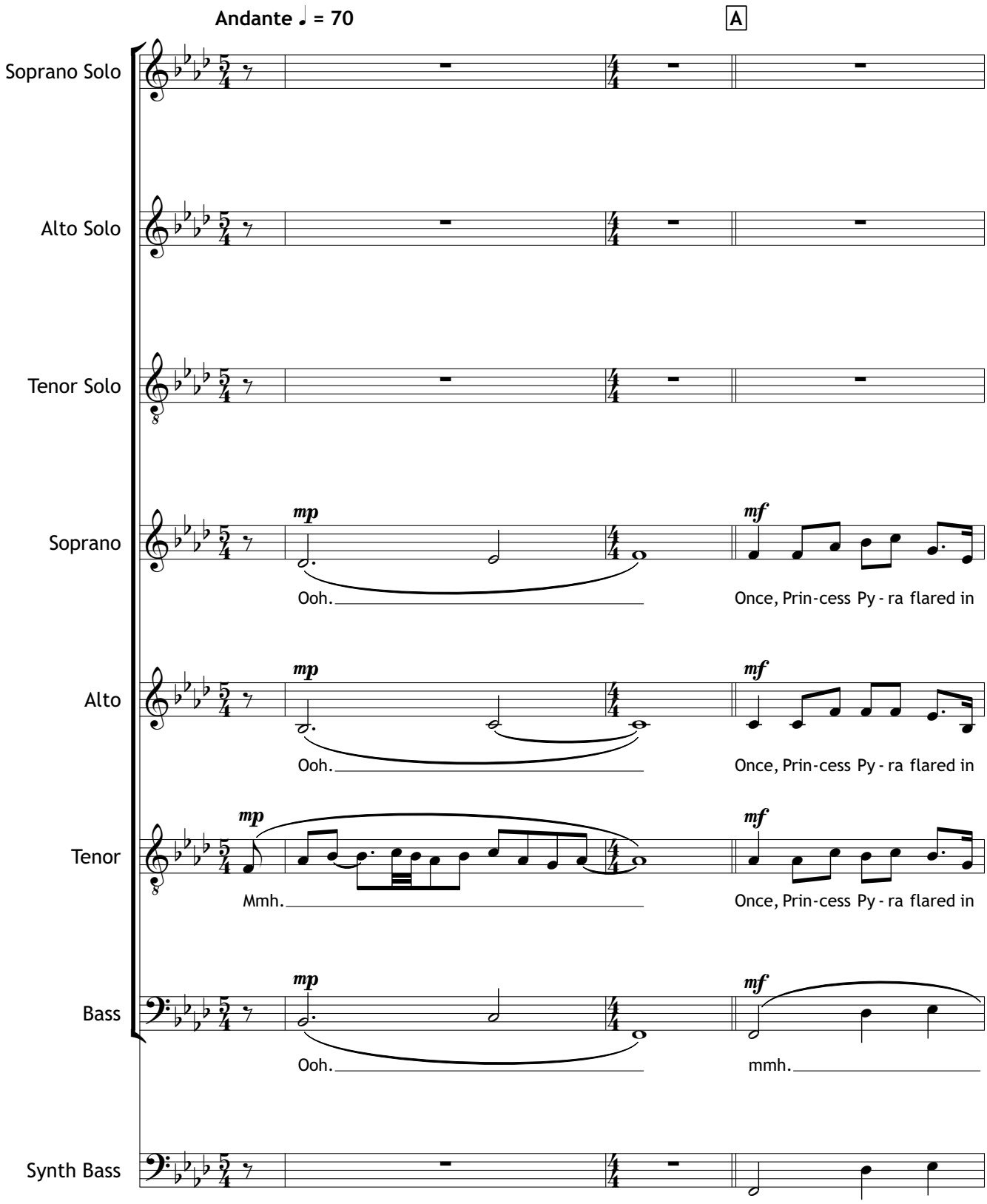
But real life is not a fairy tale.

On A Pincushion

Senescence: Item 2 of "Tome of Stars"

Stargazer

Vocal Ensemble



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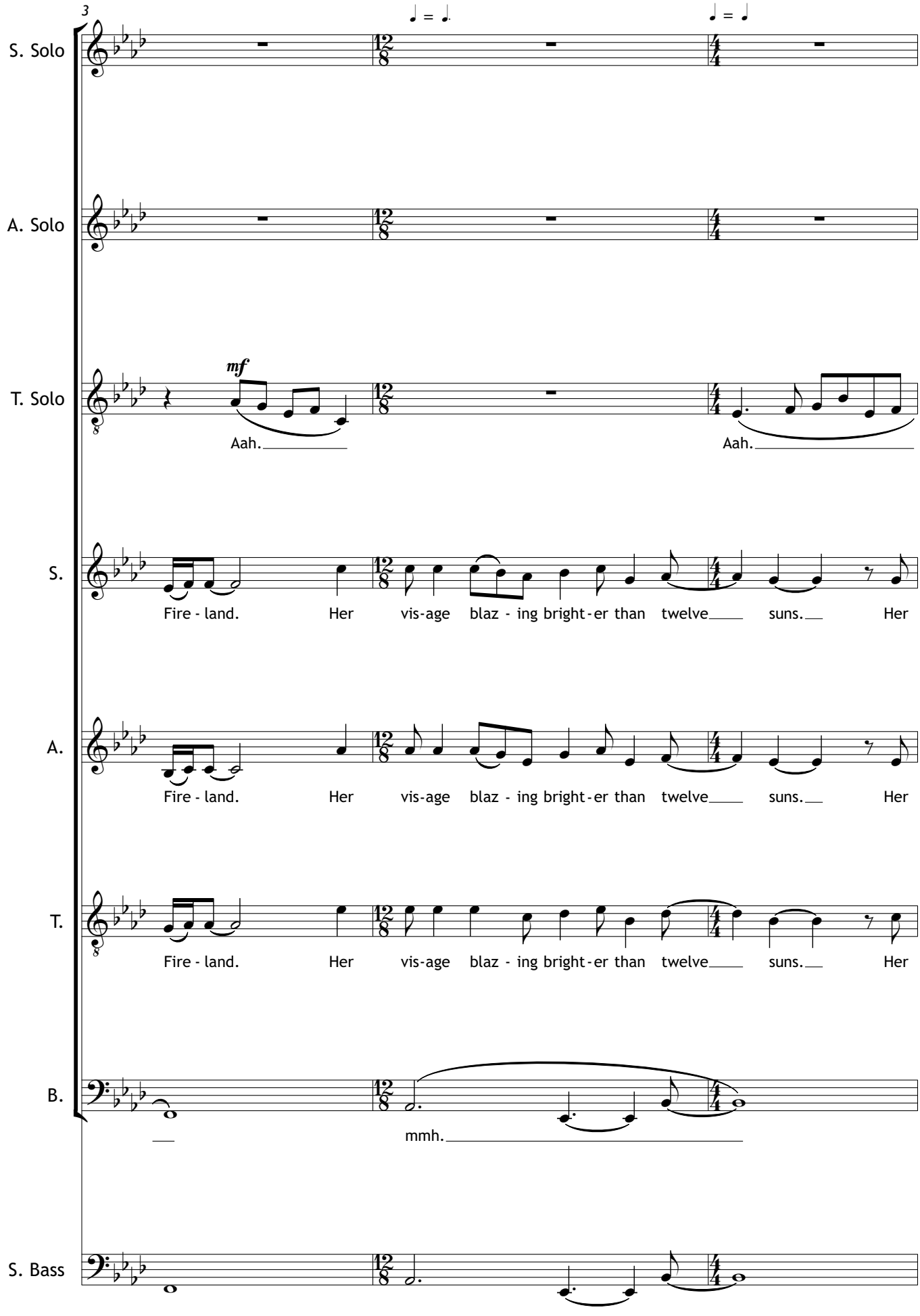

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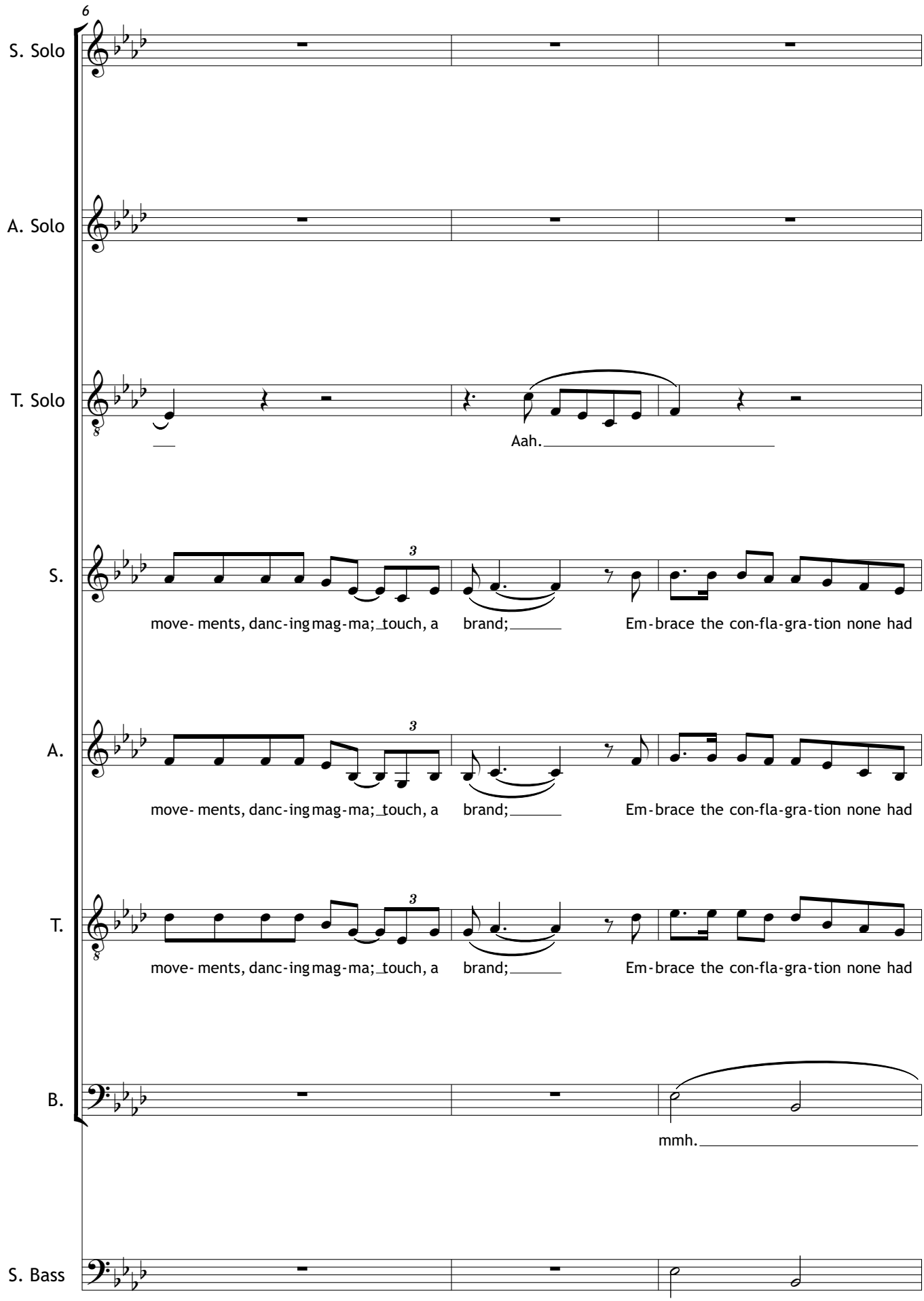

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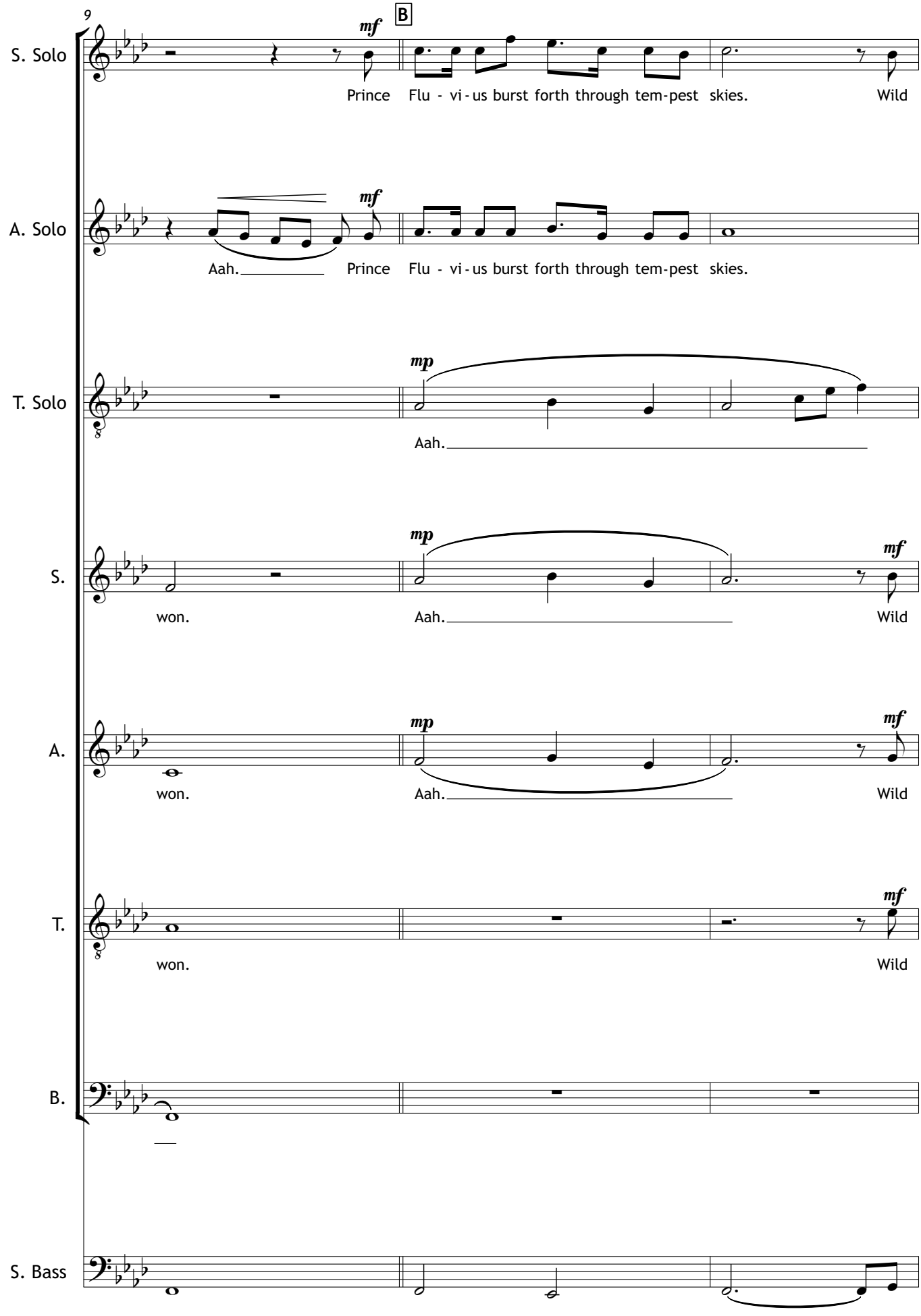

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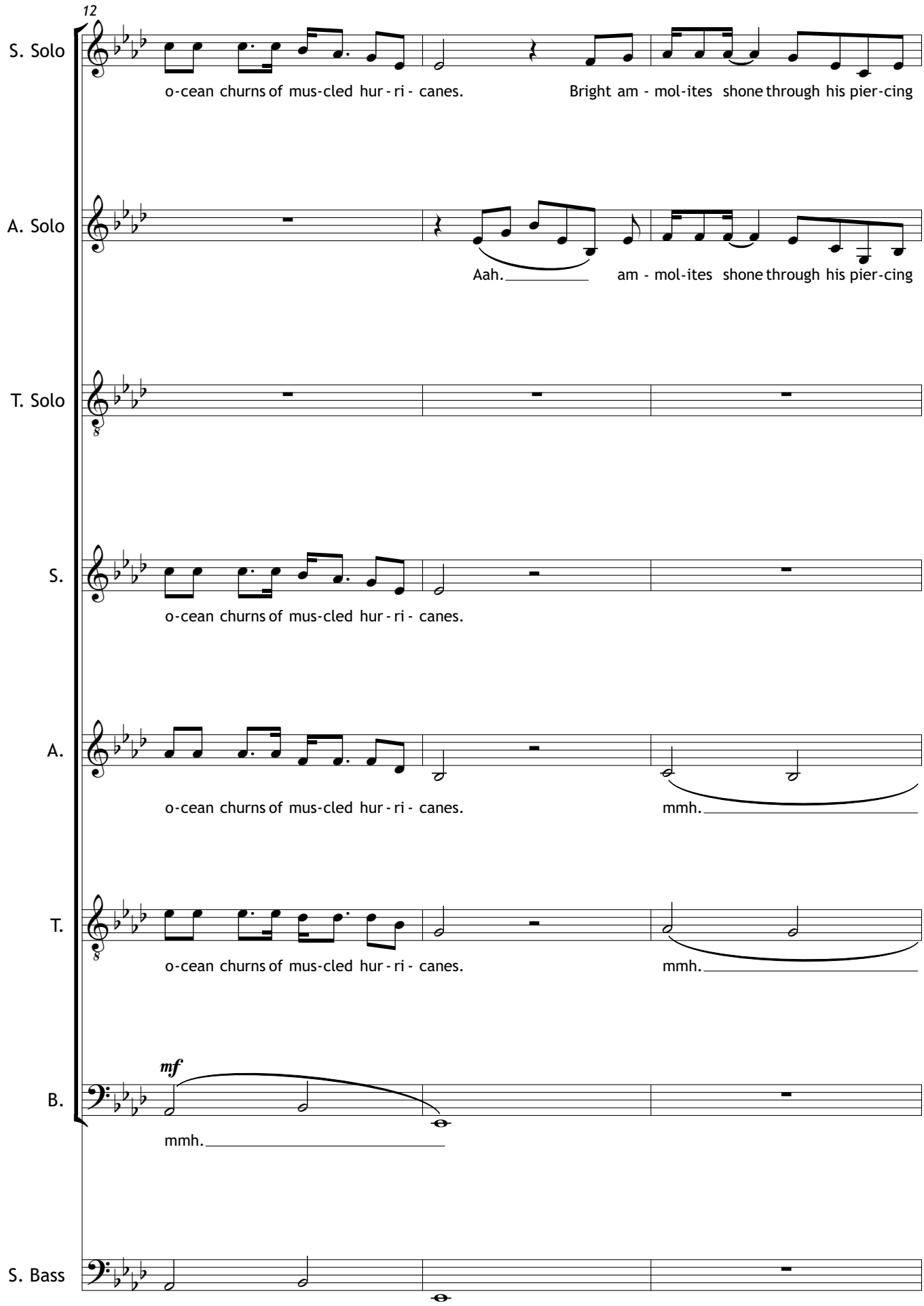

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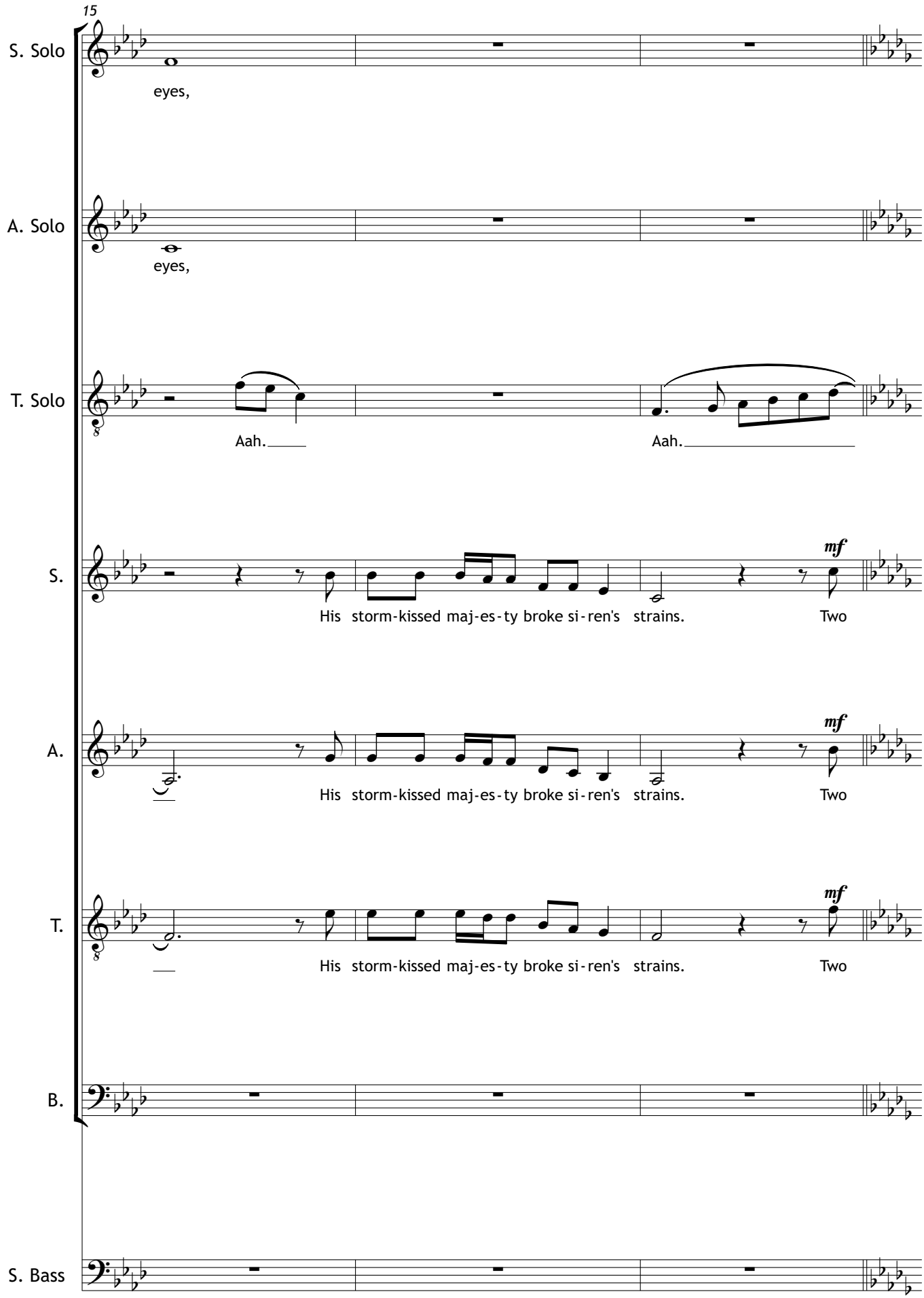

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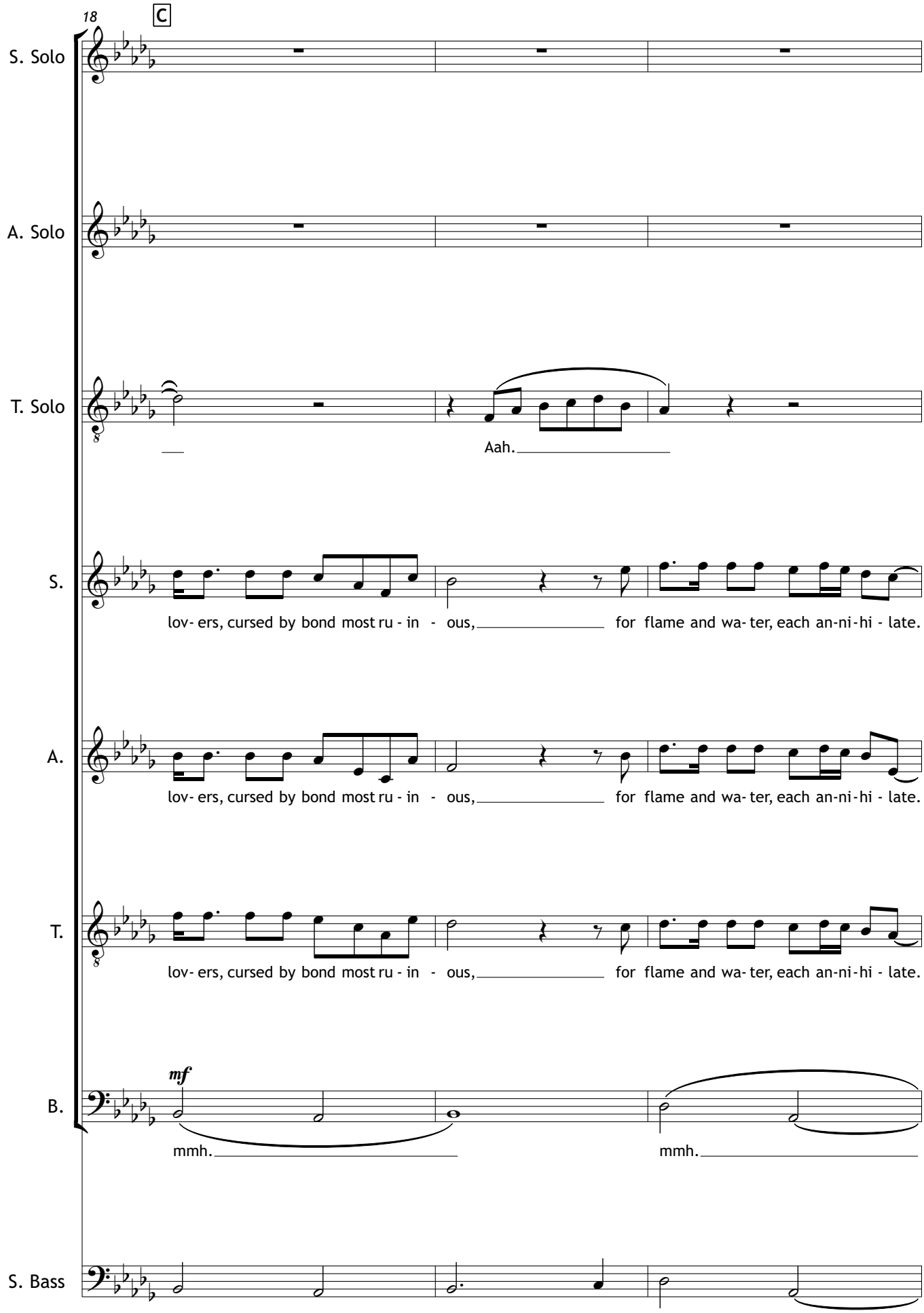

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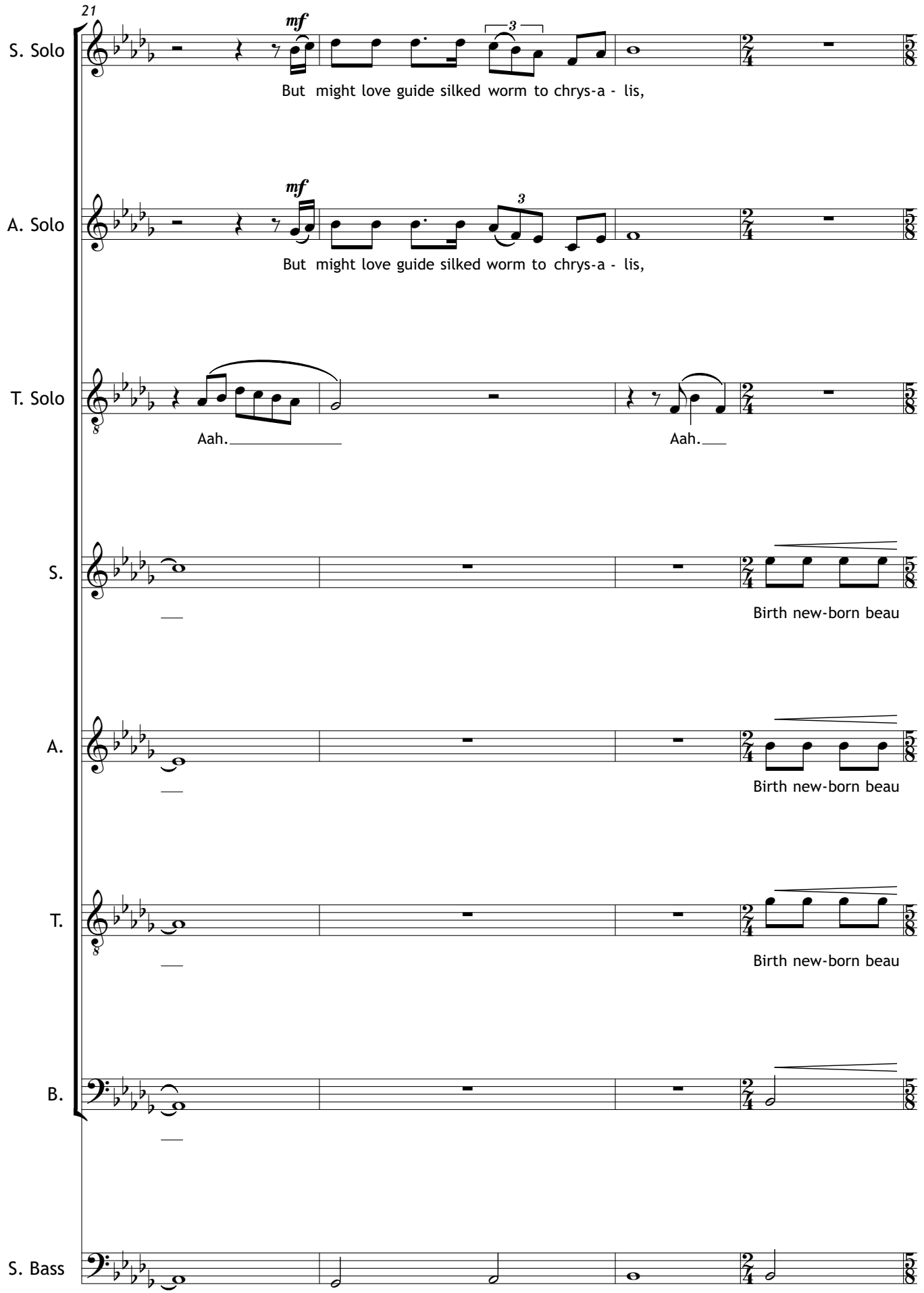

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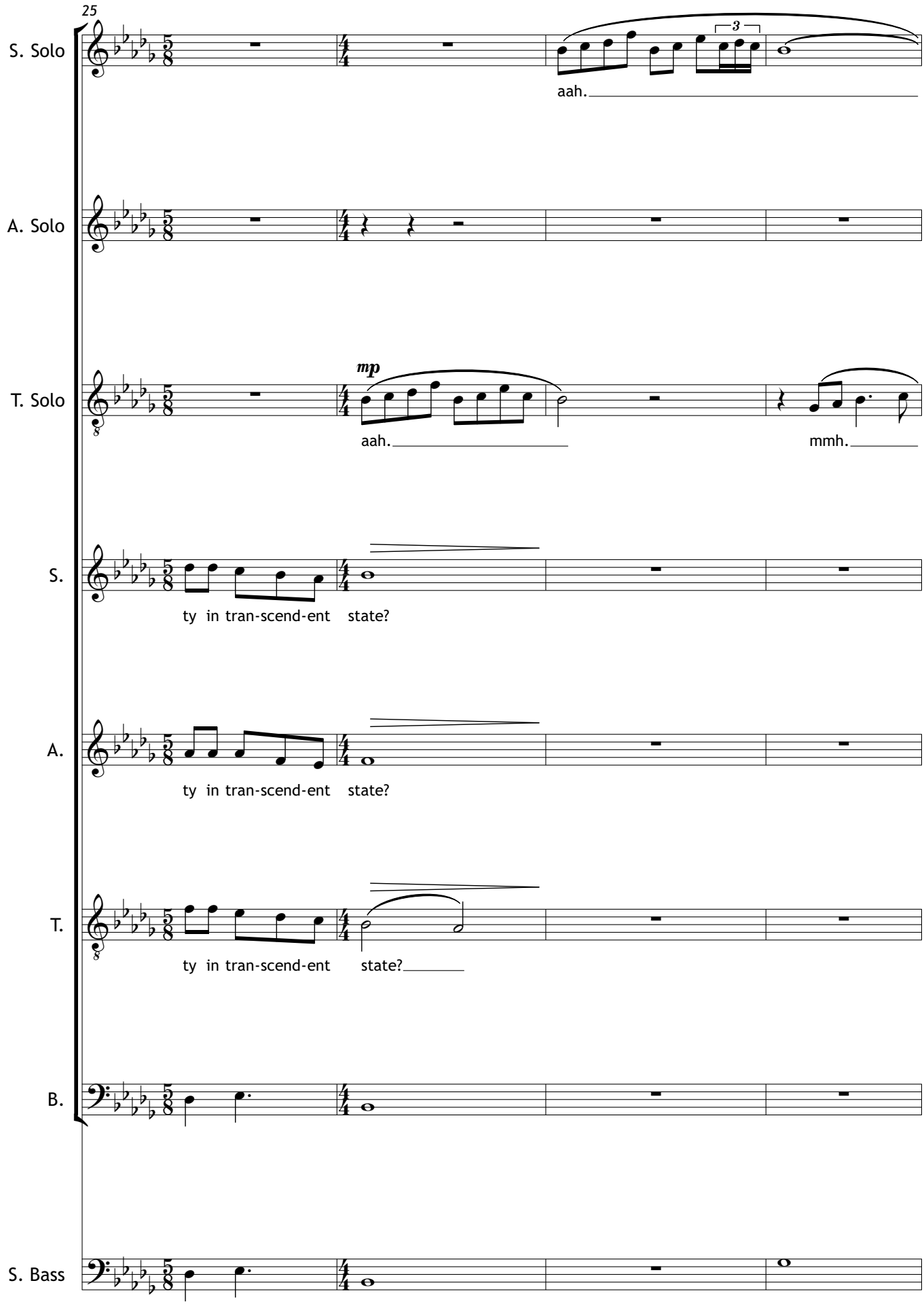

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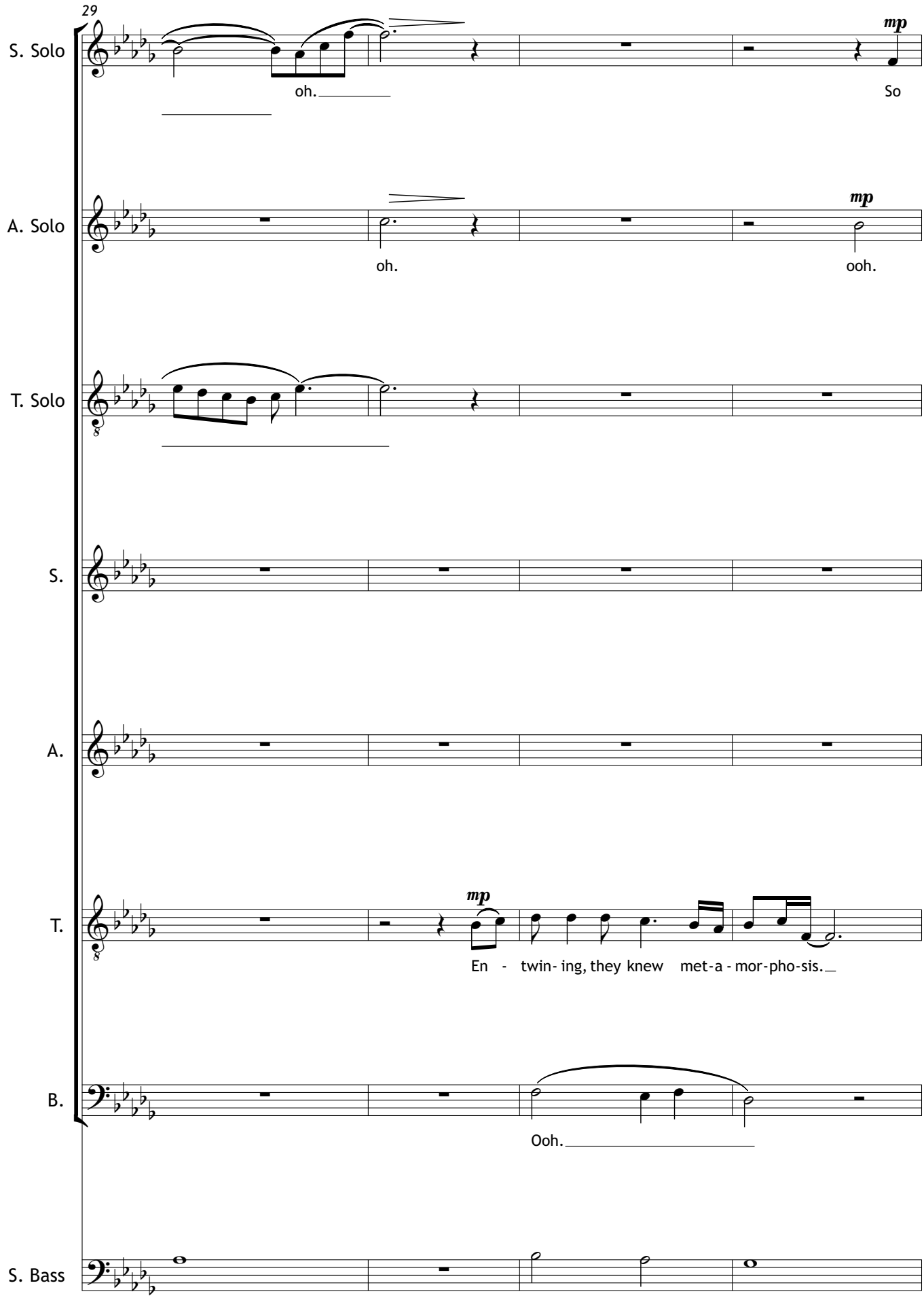

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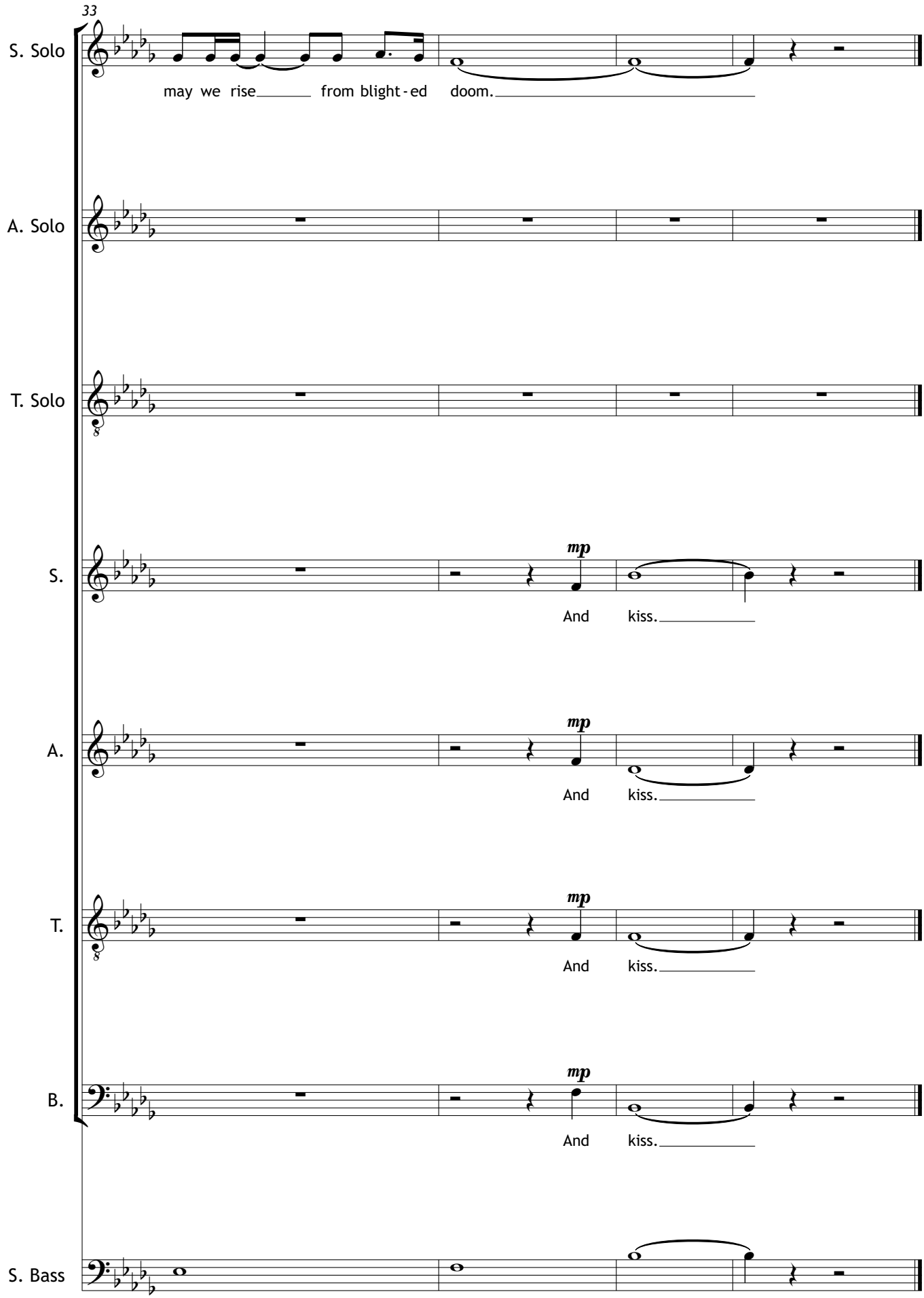

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15. Queried Letters

When the poet finished *Tome of Stars*, he prepared a "query letter" for literary agents. To convey the nature of the work, he wrote the sonnet *Queried Letters* and placed it at the top of the letter to agents. He came to view the project as too personally sacred to subject it to commercial publication and abandoned this effort.

As a brief distillation of *Tome of Stars*, the poem covers romantic transfiguration, emotional immolation, and, through the fertility of literature to produce more writing, the longevity of story. The author is described as a *"blind alchemist,"* blinded as the verse reveals by trying to *"cage a star within an earthbound sphere."* This is of course a metaphor for the poet seeking to remain with the Stargirl, a being beyond him, who sears and scars his corrupted essence. The first quatrain summarizes this mutilating failure, the second his later efforts to *"repurpose"* the "*ruins"* into something else - an alchemy of taking loss, pain, and love and spinning it into *Tome of Stars*, itself: *"writ in chanted scrolls"* (here the poet indulges in several word plays from "*writ in"*/*"written"* to *"in chanted"*/*"enchanted"*).

By the third, he has in hand his *"bright book of night"* that will "*bleed pages singed with fire/Each rhyme a ray from rended heart and mind."* It is a story pulled from his essence, *"Life's ink, vein-drawn from sorrow and desire,"* but not simply as a stand alone piece of art. It is instead something that will catalyze further art, something he hopes *"ignites new pyres"* (the fires *"ash-less"* because it is a fire that does not consume, but engenders). The final couplet continues these ideas, noting the obvious mortality of the poet and all who currently exist with *"our flesh will burn,"* contrasted with the ability of narrative to persist beyond the writer as "*stories do not die,"* stimulating more art: *"spark verse across the sky."*

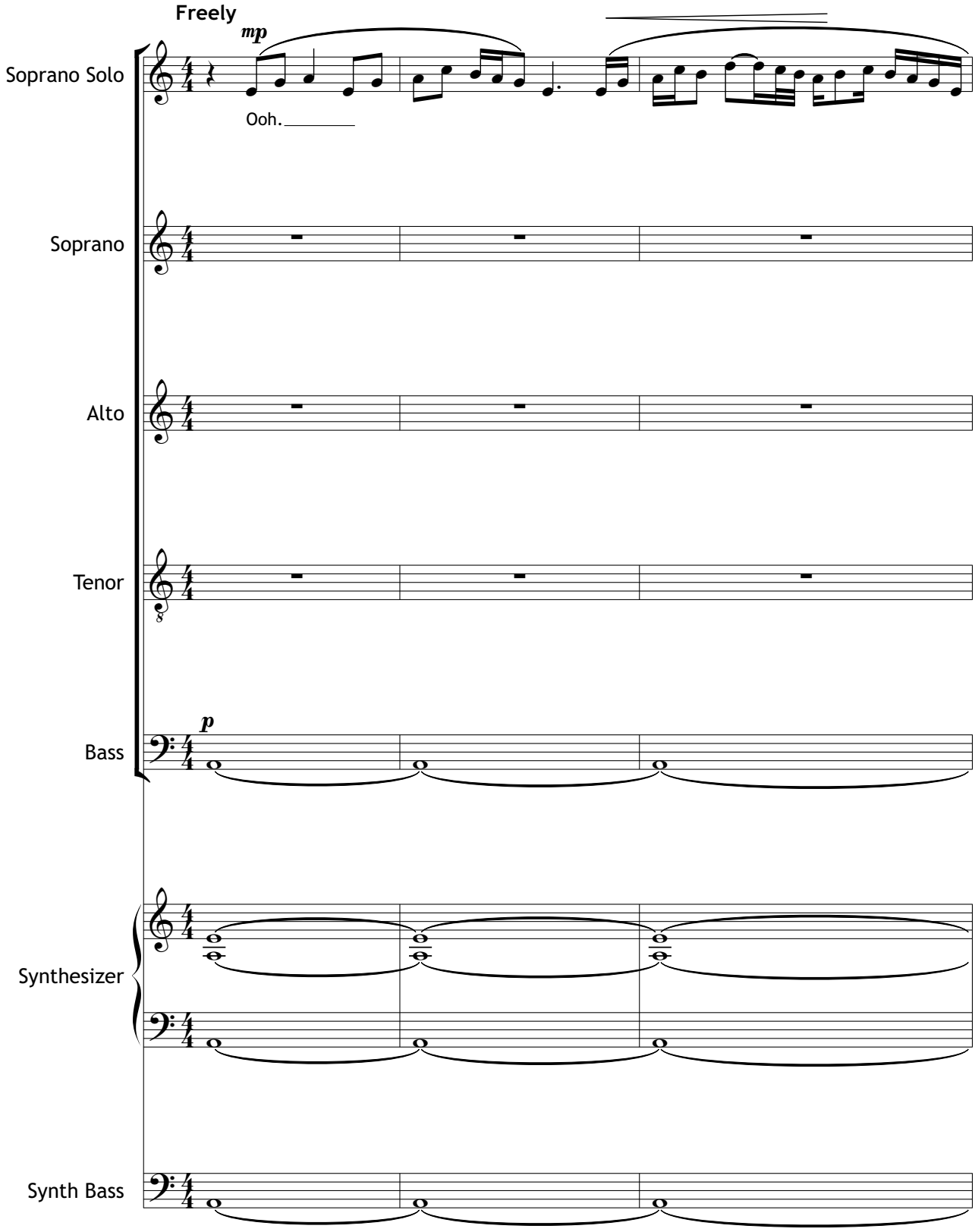
This is not the poet seeking his personal immortality in writing, but instead not wishing this story of love and loss (either aspect) dying in a corner of human history without some effort to hold it up before the world and say, to borrow a bit from Shelley, "Look on our love and loss, brethren, smile, weep, and despair!" The poet is quite satisfied to perish forever in obscurity, but he hopes the story of Stargazer and the Stargirl will not die, but inspire other artists (*"spark verse across the sky"*).

Queried Letters

Celestial Mechanics: A "Tome of Stars" Companion

Stargazer

Vocal Ensemble



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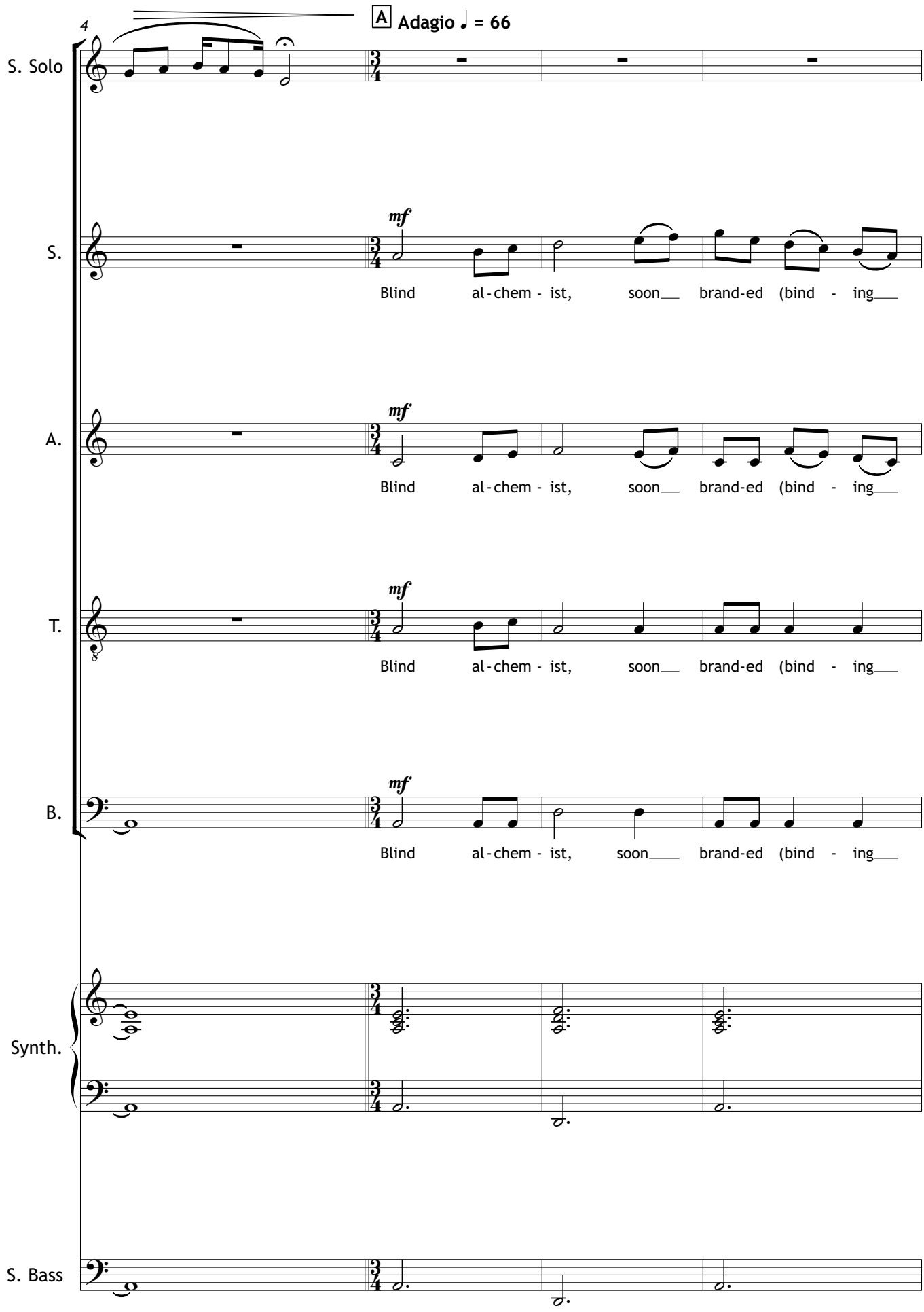

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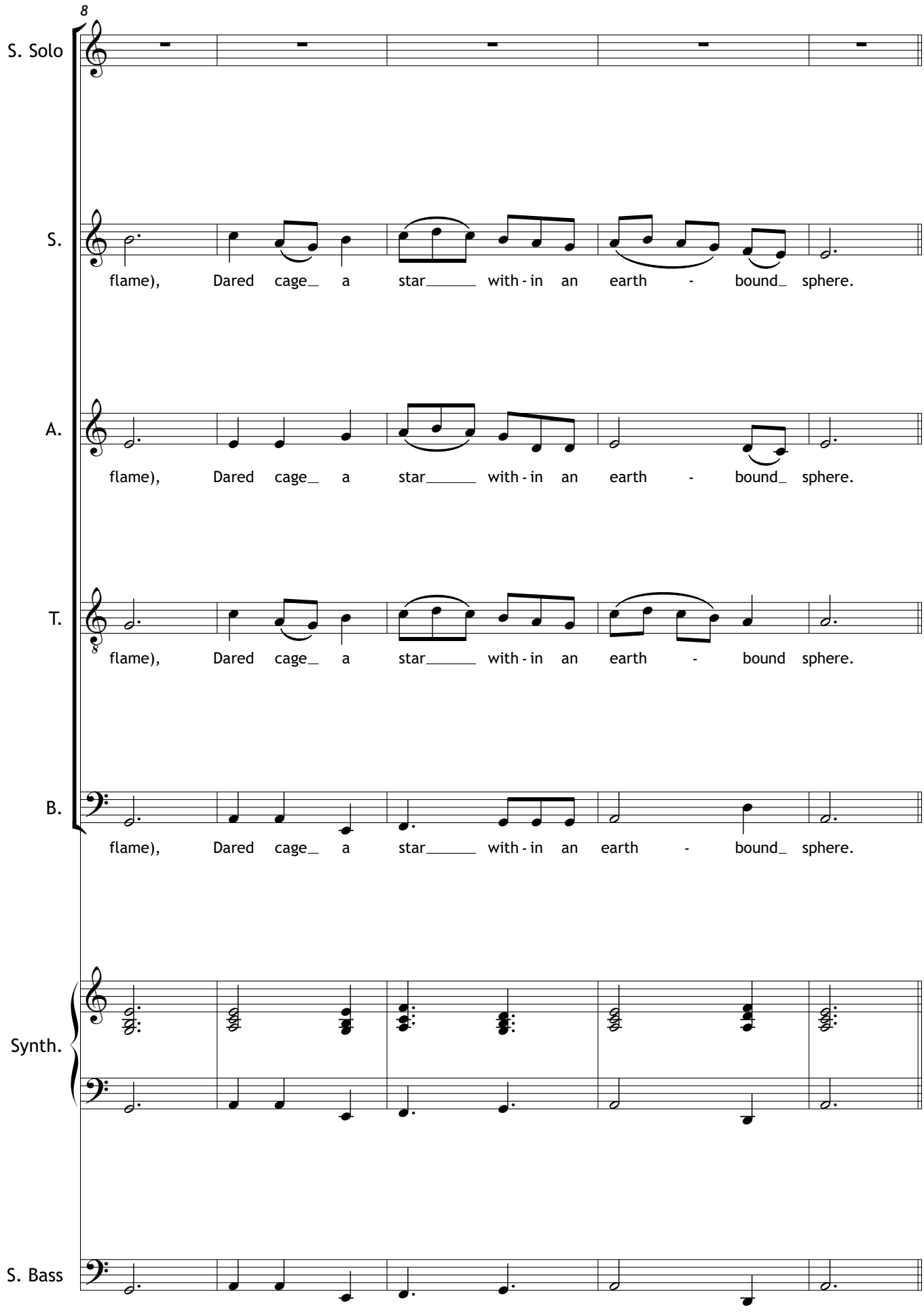

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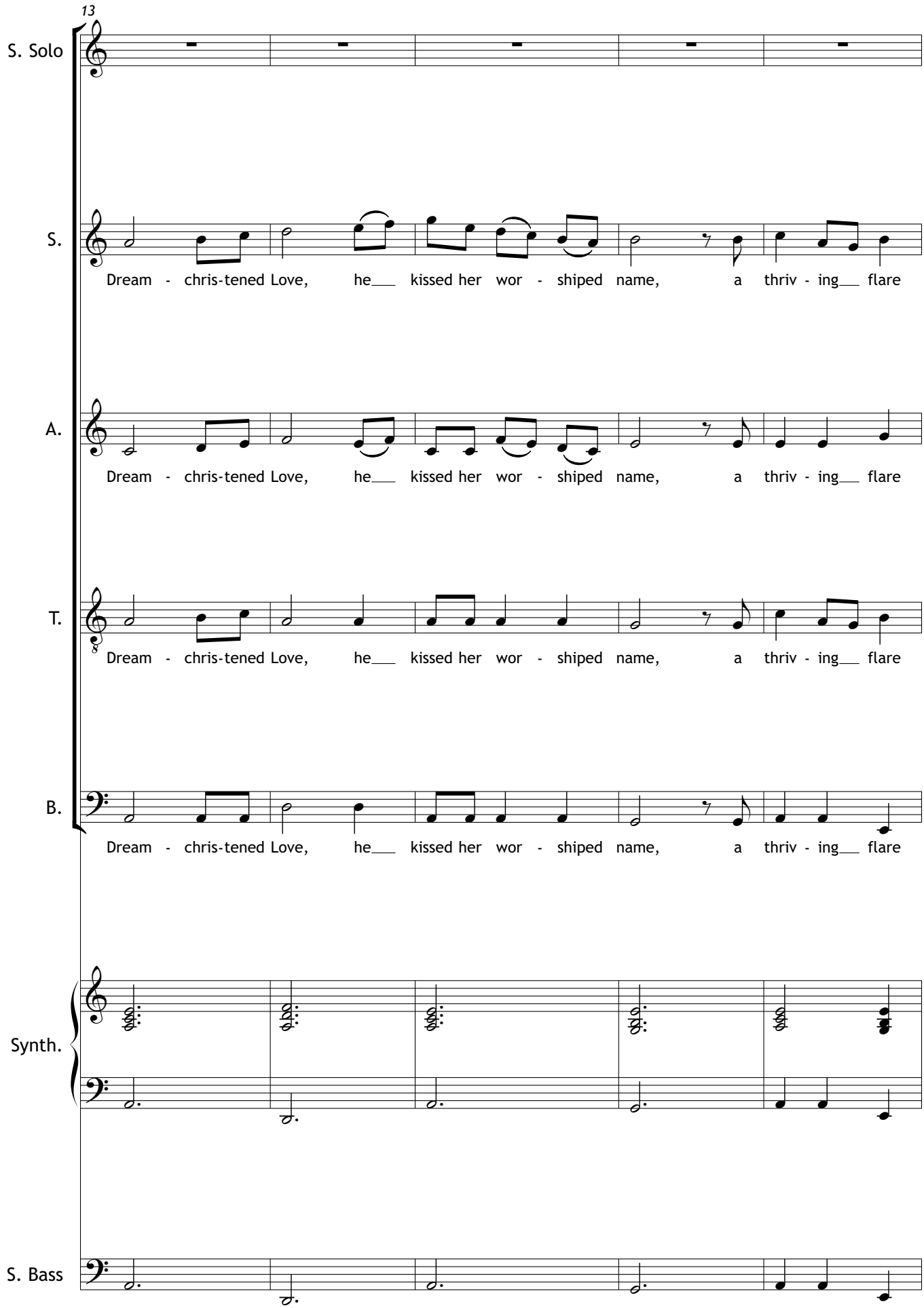

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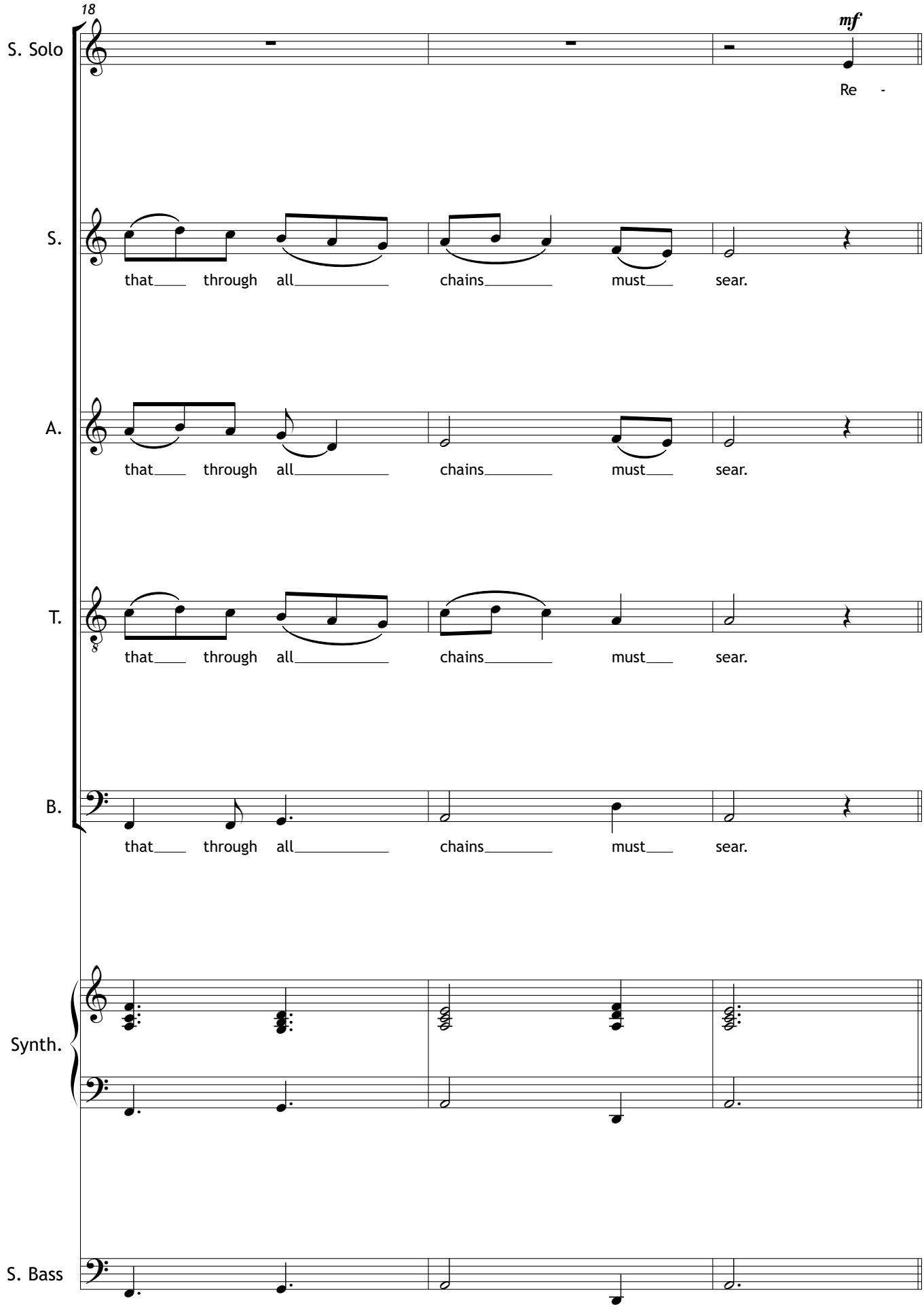

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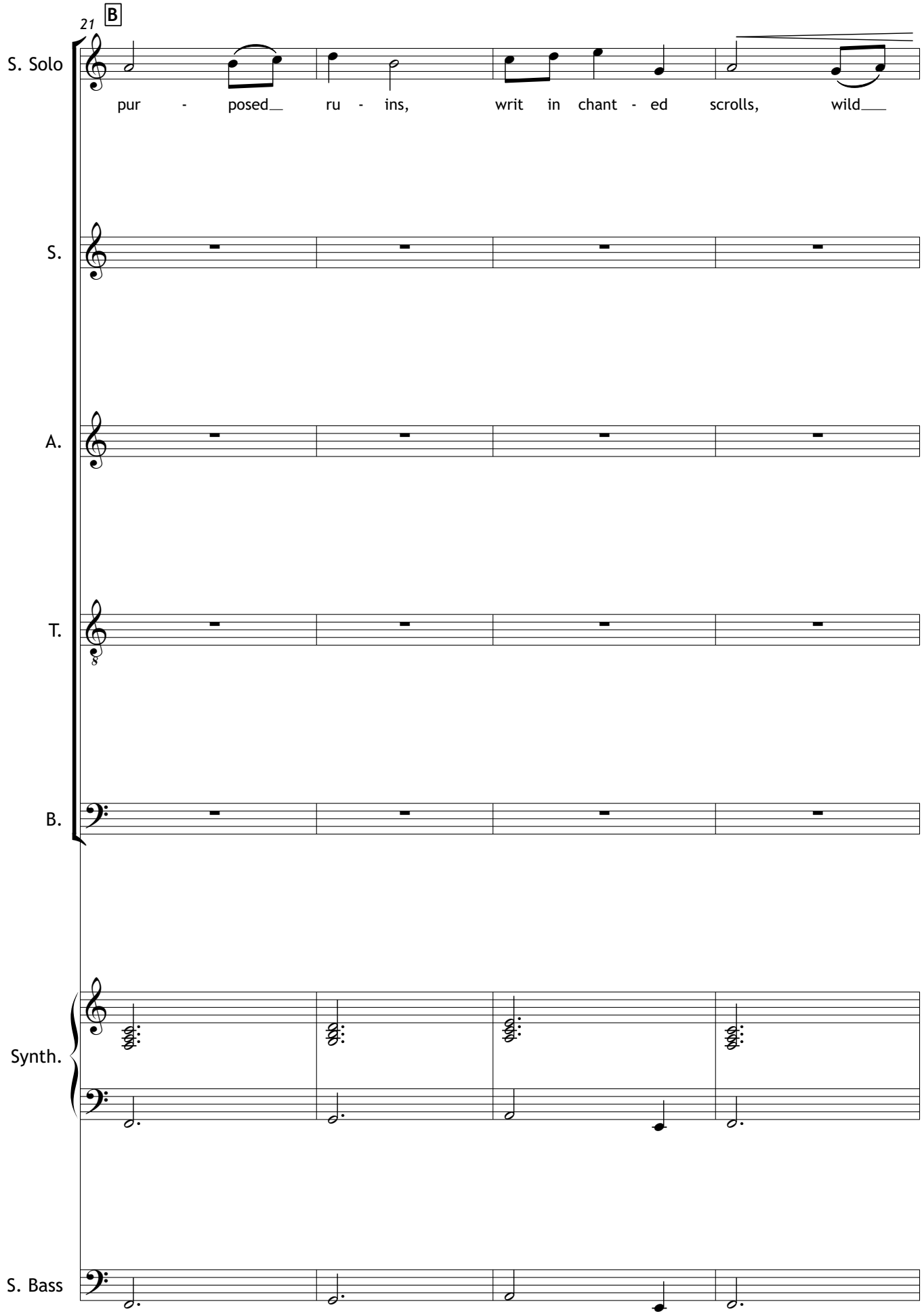

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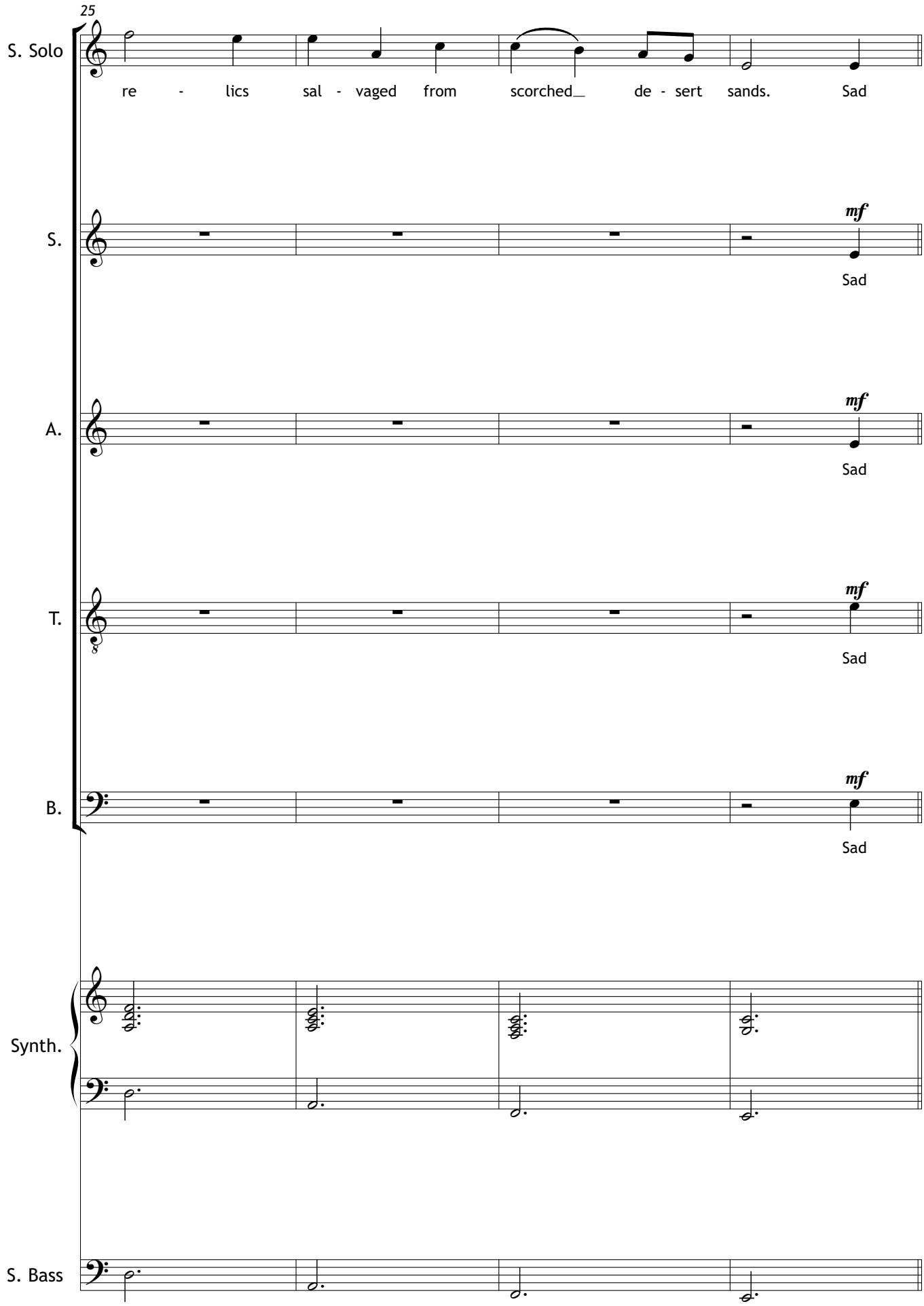

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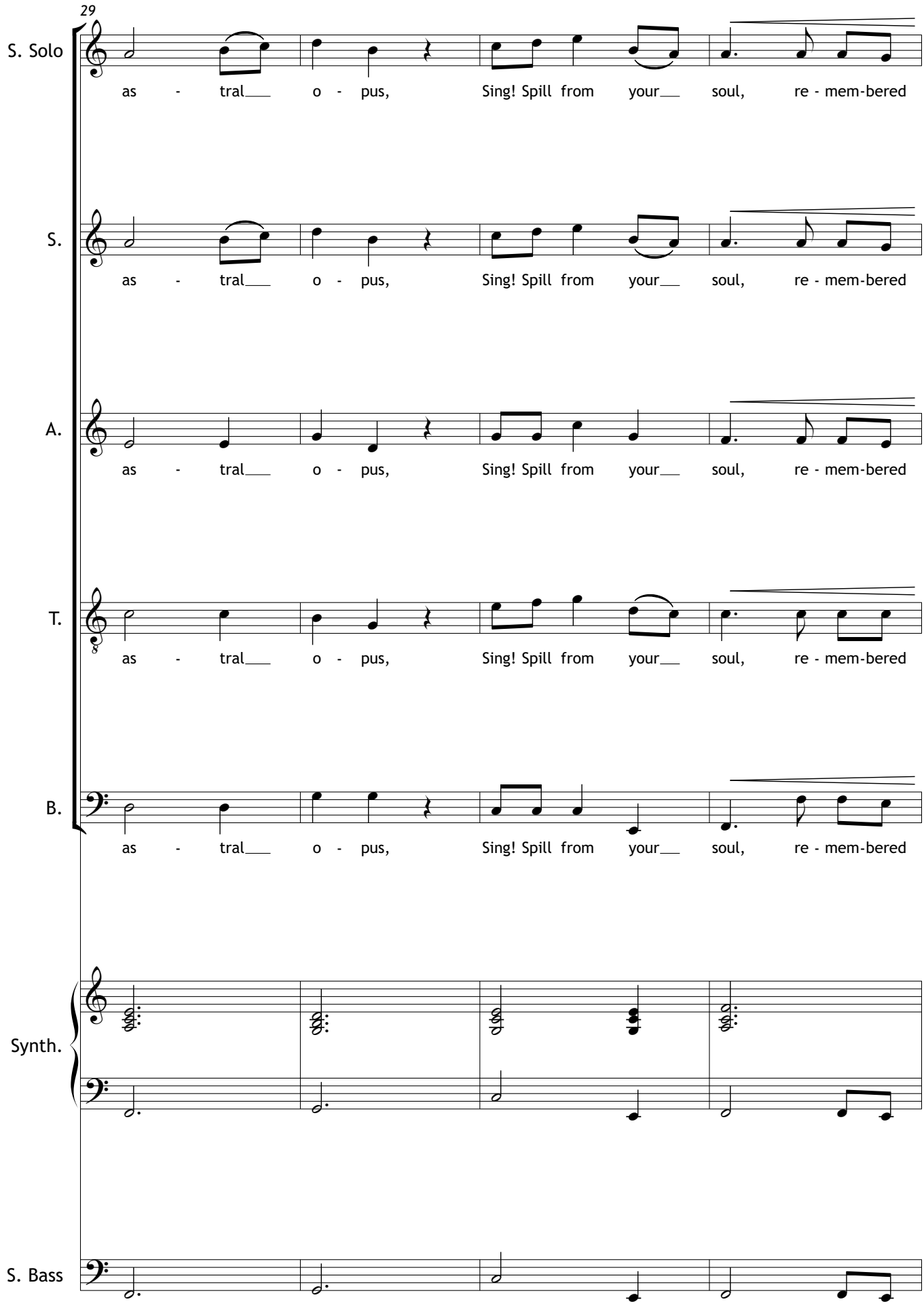

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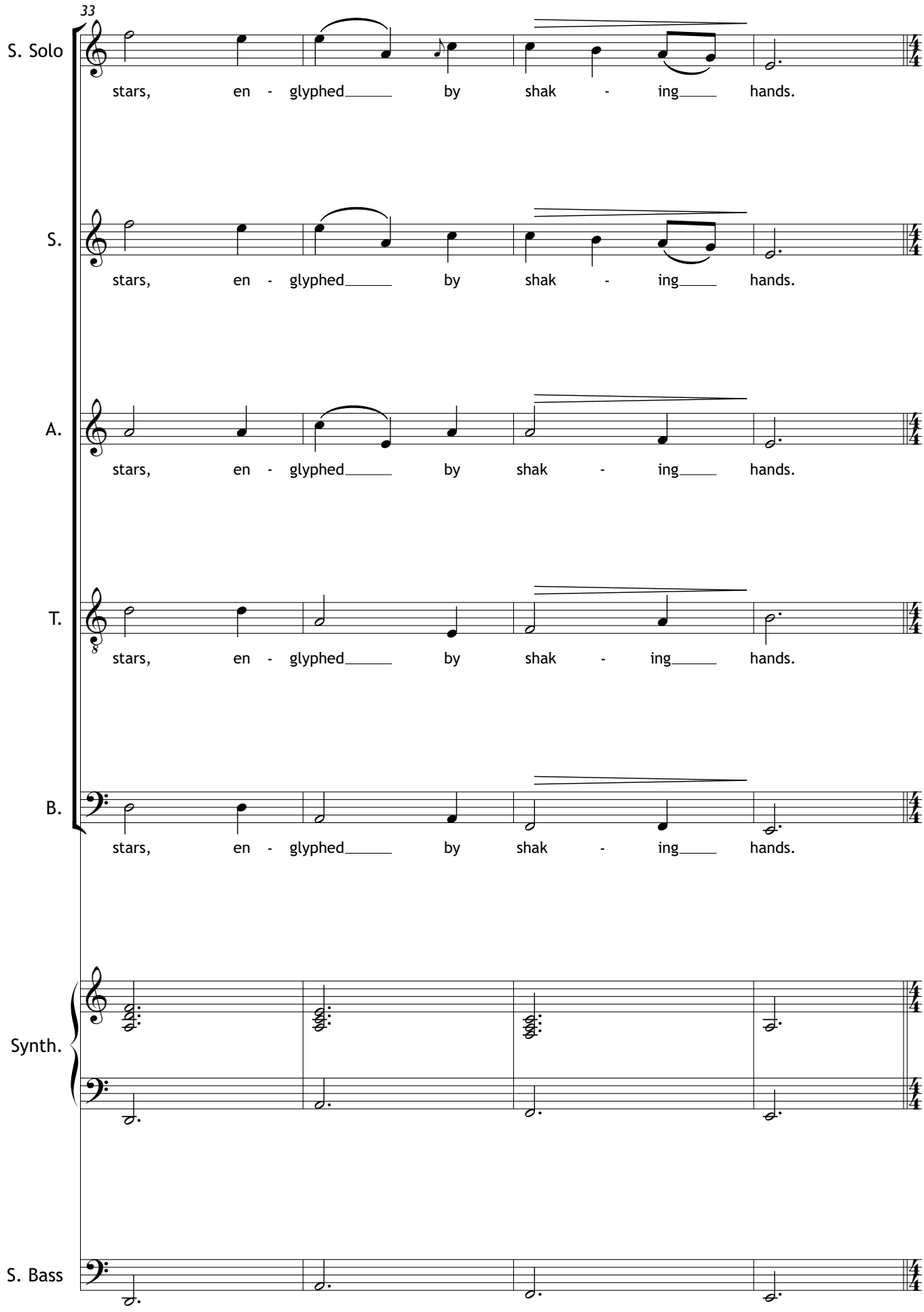

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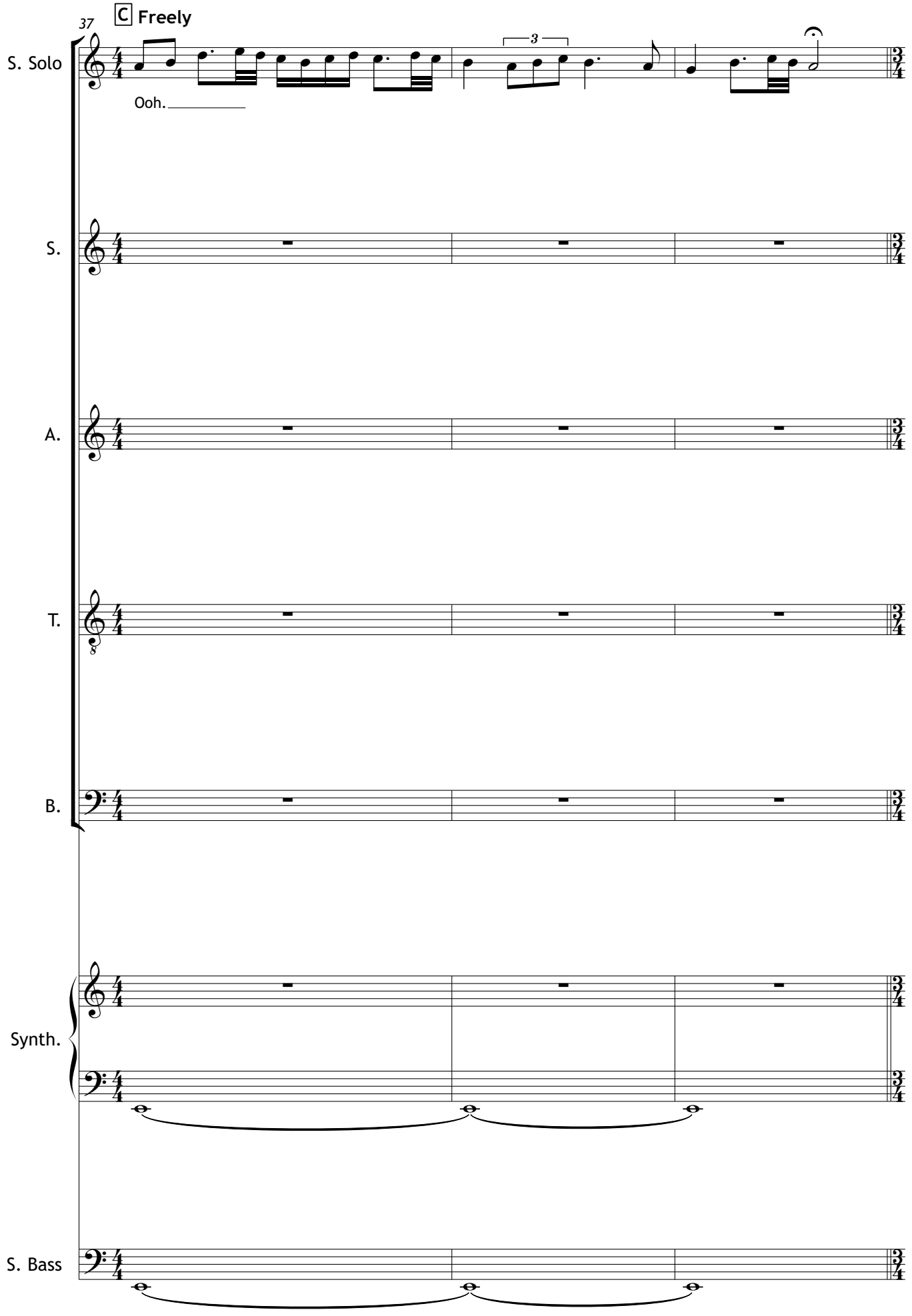

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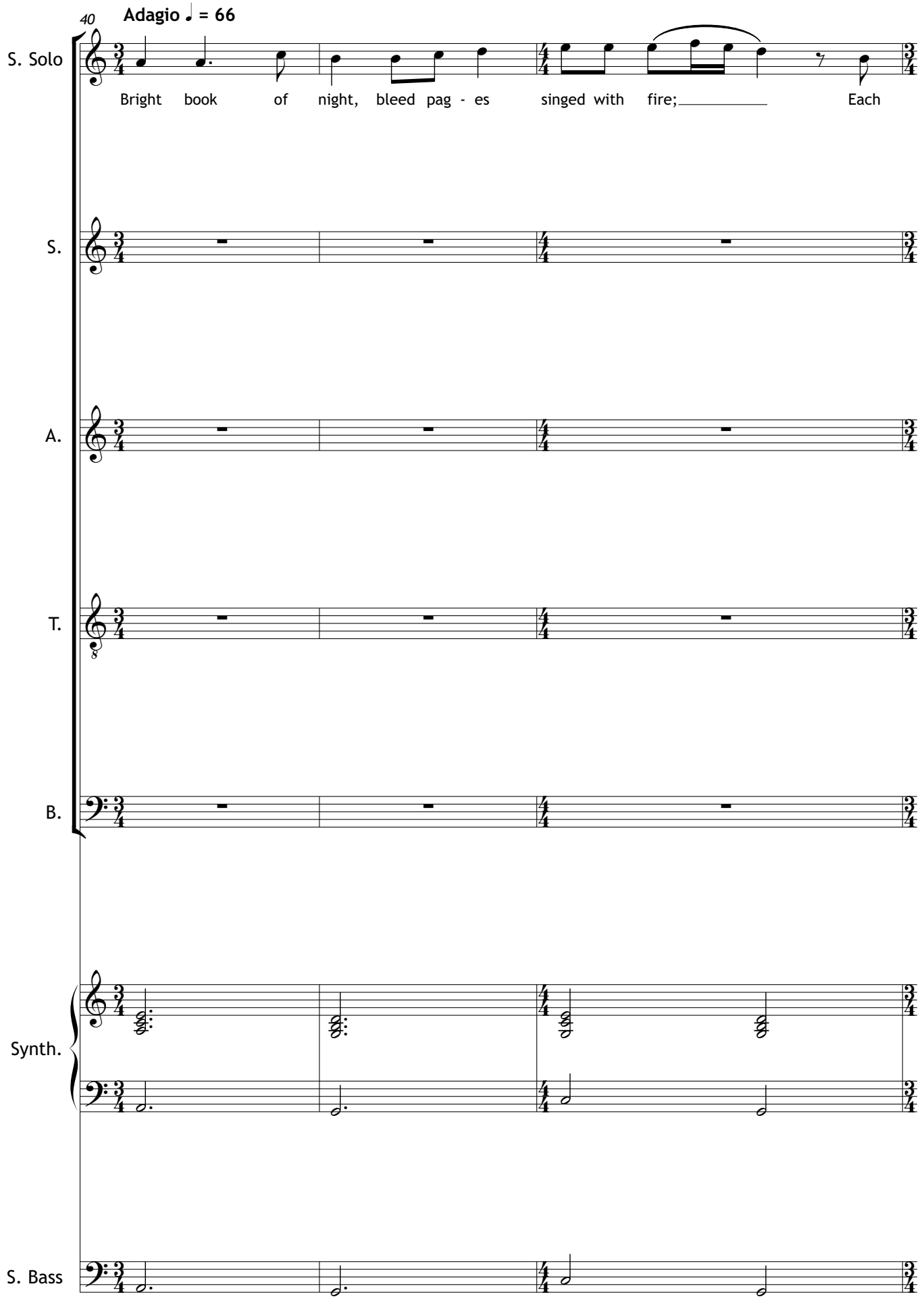

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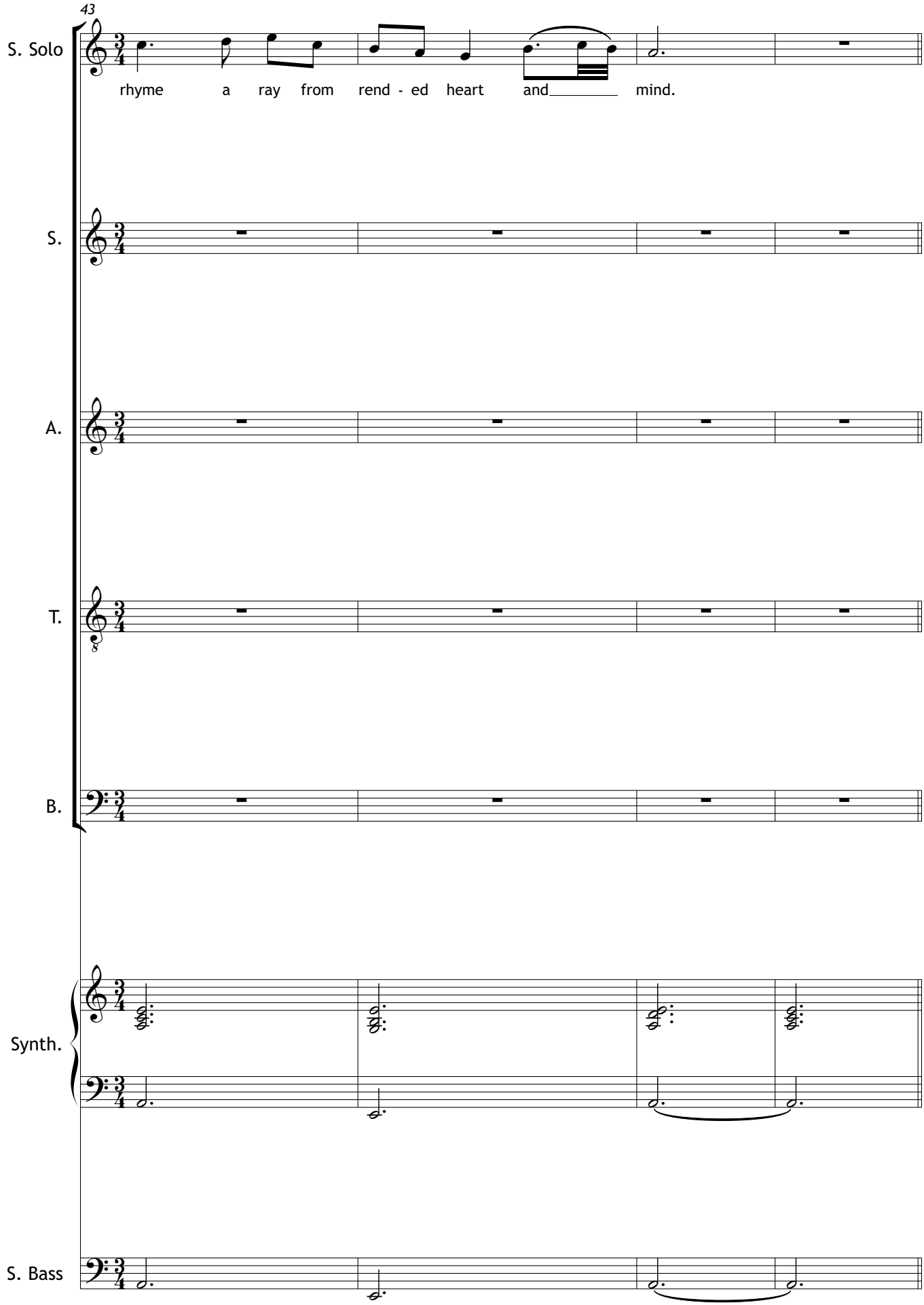

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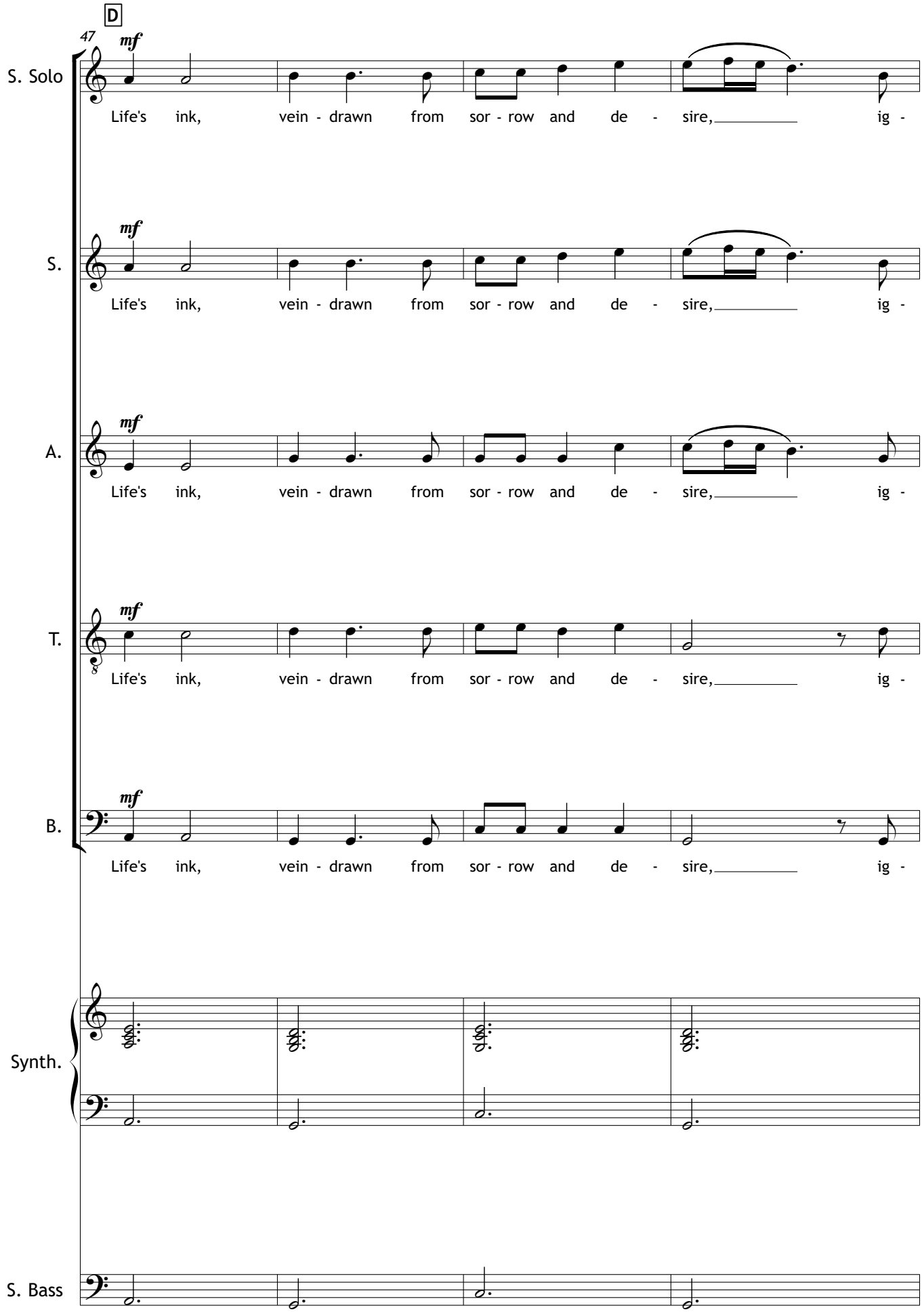

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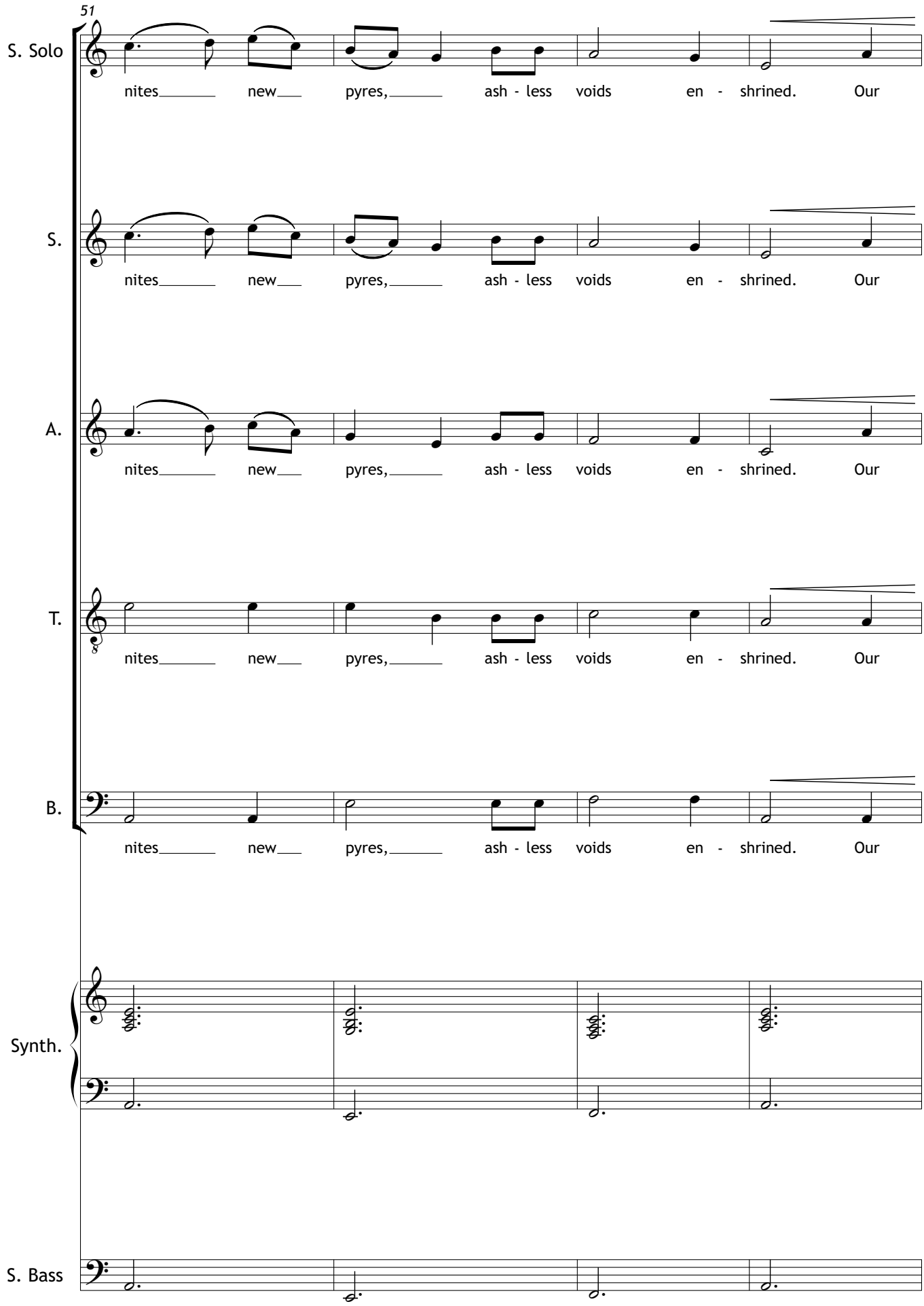

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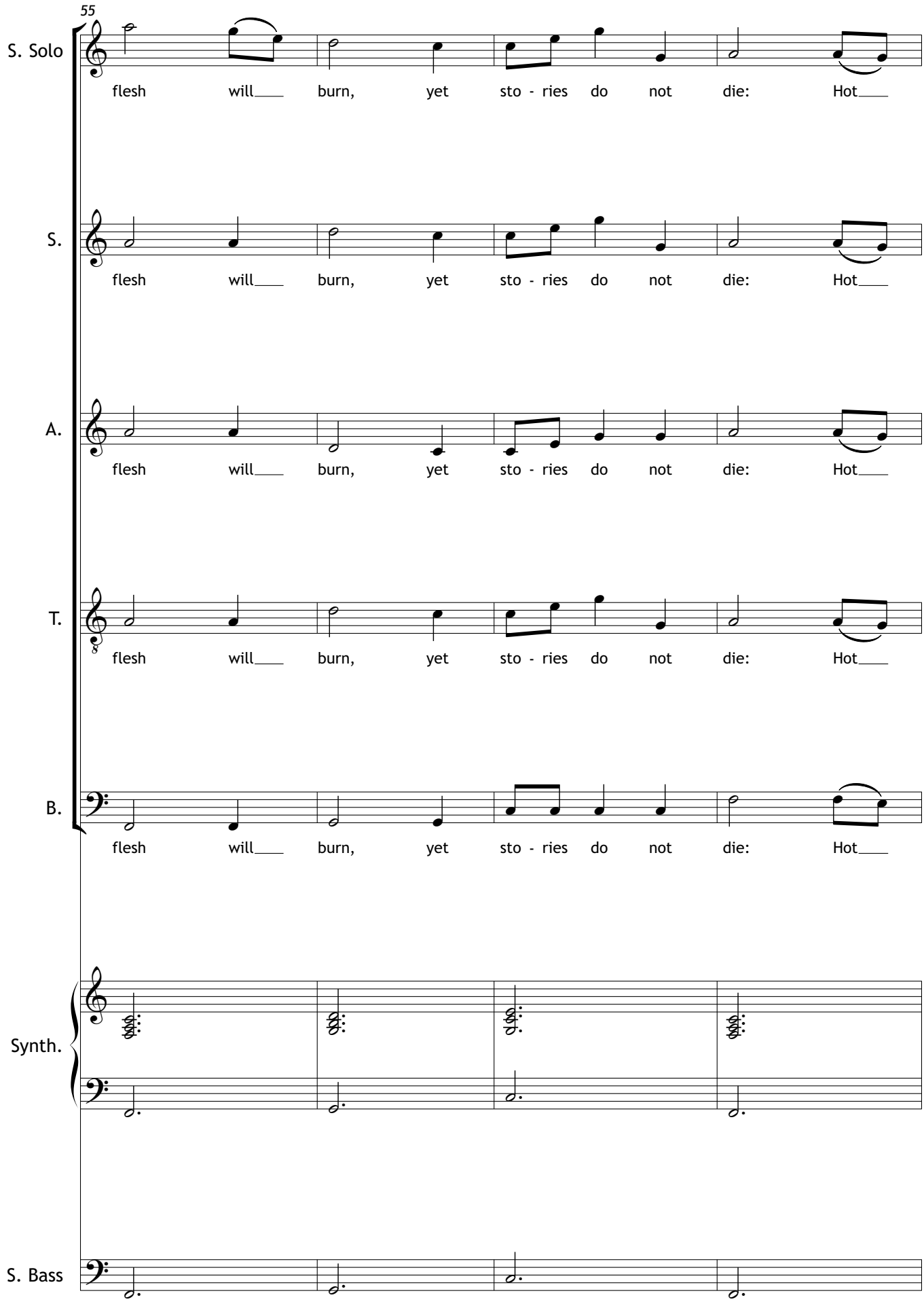

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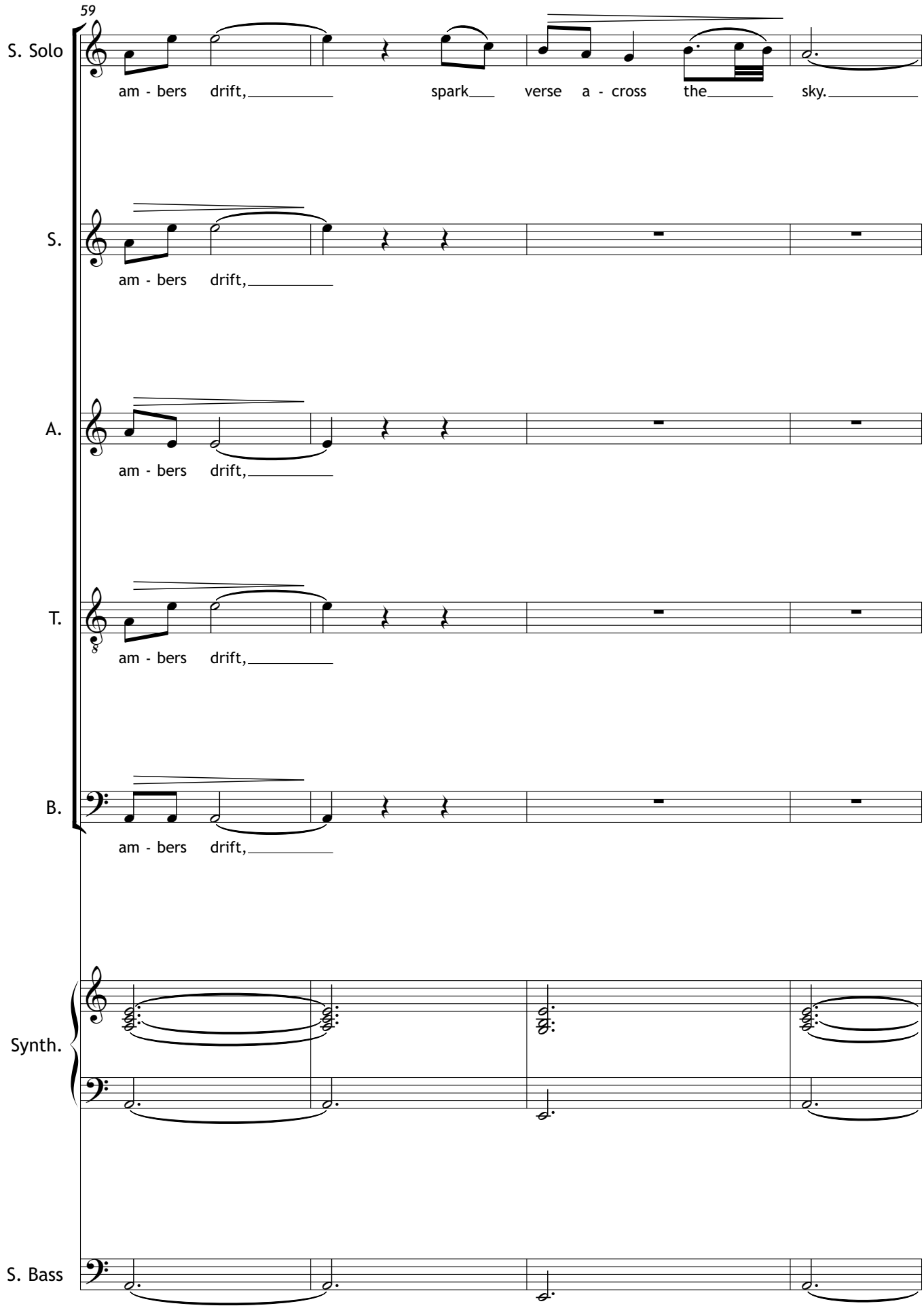

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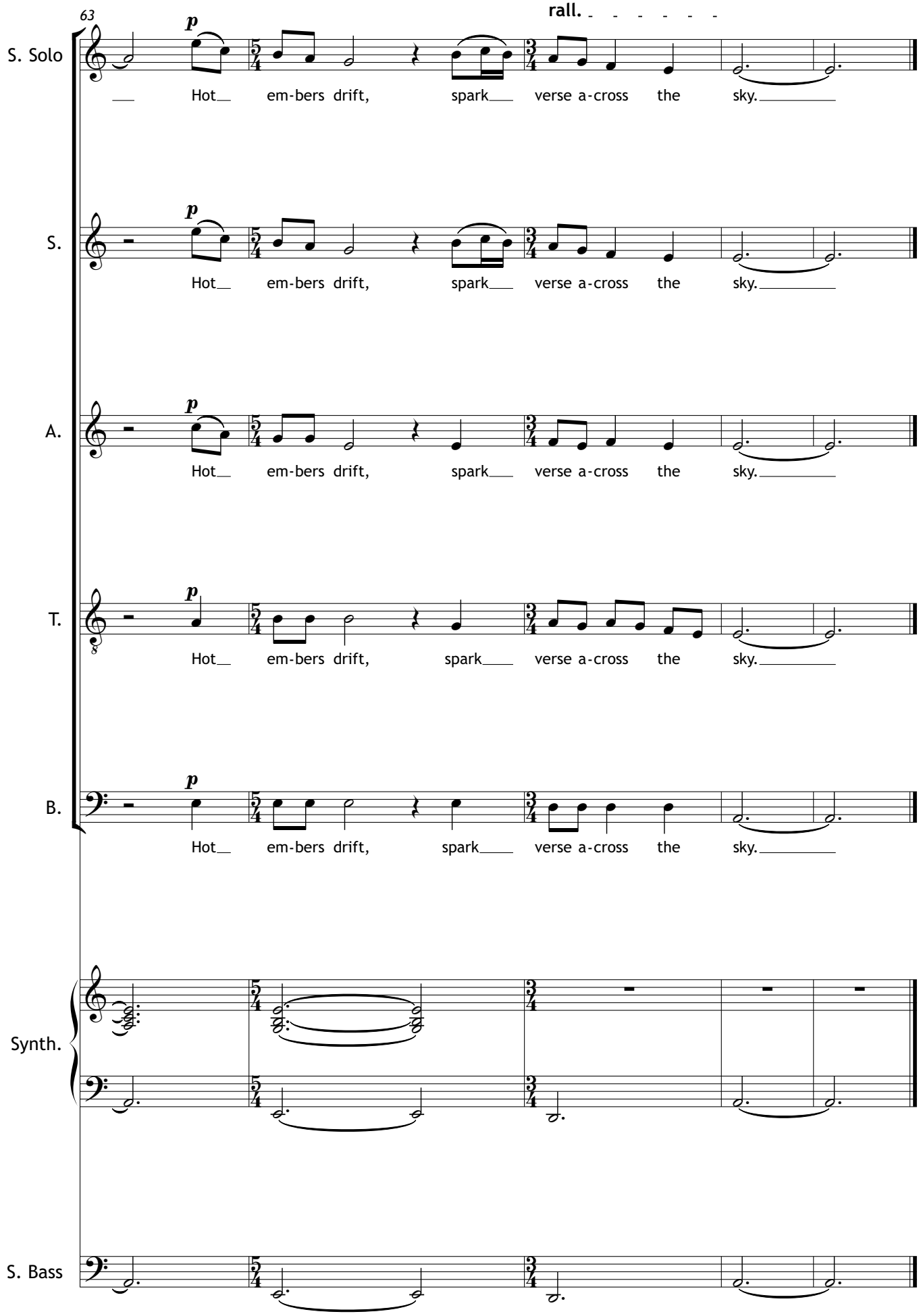

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16. Polaris

Tapping into the frequent literary use of the North Star as a symbol of constancy, fidelity, guidance, and stability, the Stargirl is presented as both the generative Mother of the cosmos (*"The cosmos, birthed within her endless womb"*) and as the ever betrayed parent or lover who is constant in her love (*"Betrays her love, yet still she sweetly sings"*). She imbues her presence within all beings, as she *"lingers in the silent folds of thought"* as a "*deep voice, a distant dream beneath our sleep."* This places her in a realm of a divine always subconsciously felt.

The longing of the devotee is seen most rawly in the lines: *"Her absence is the agony we've bought./We lurch and grasp at joys that only weep."* For the poet, as the rest of *Tome of Stars* likely repeats too frequently, the loss of the beloved is a constant agony he blames his flawed nature for, and, as many poems make clear, his false life has been lurching and grasping to transcend agonies but finding only sorrow.

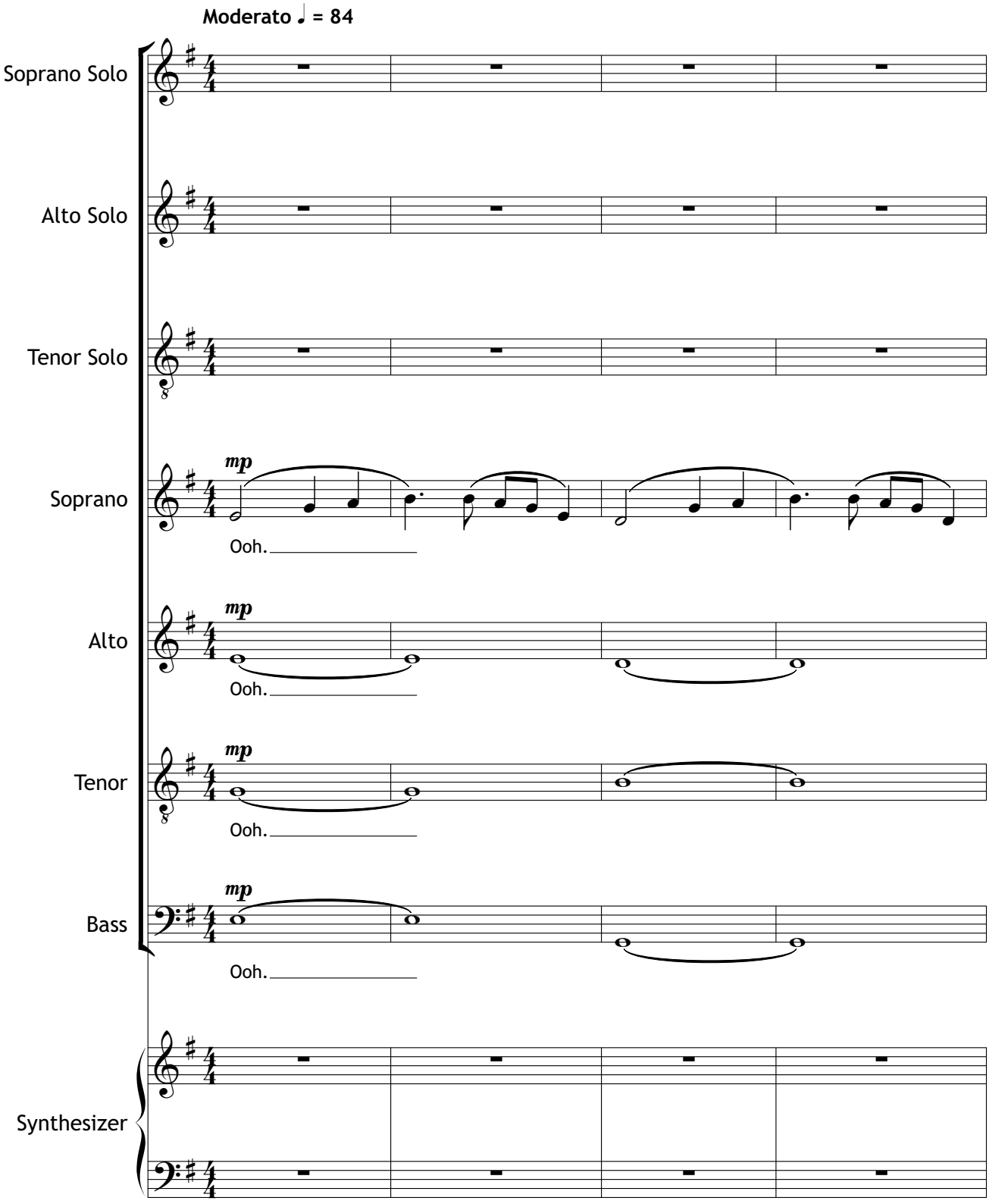
The devotee then explains that miracles can occur, and the common mortal can at times come into the presence of the Stargirl when they are humble and stand before the bright stars of heaven. Then *"Her silhouette of starlight shines like hymns/A beacon guiding exiles from their plight."* The final couplet continues this transformative encounter, as a *"favored few will find"* this *"soft, sacred sight"* to taste *"her kiss"* that *"unmakes the madness of mankind."* These words call back to poems such as *Once upon a Time, Part 3* and the coming *Transfiguration*, where the Stargirl is a force of healing.

Polaris

Scripture: Item 6 of "Tome of Stars"

Stargazer

Vocal Ensemble



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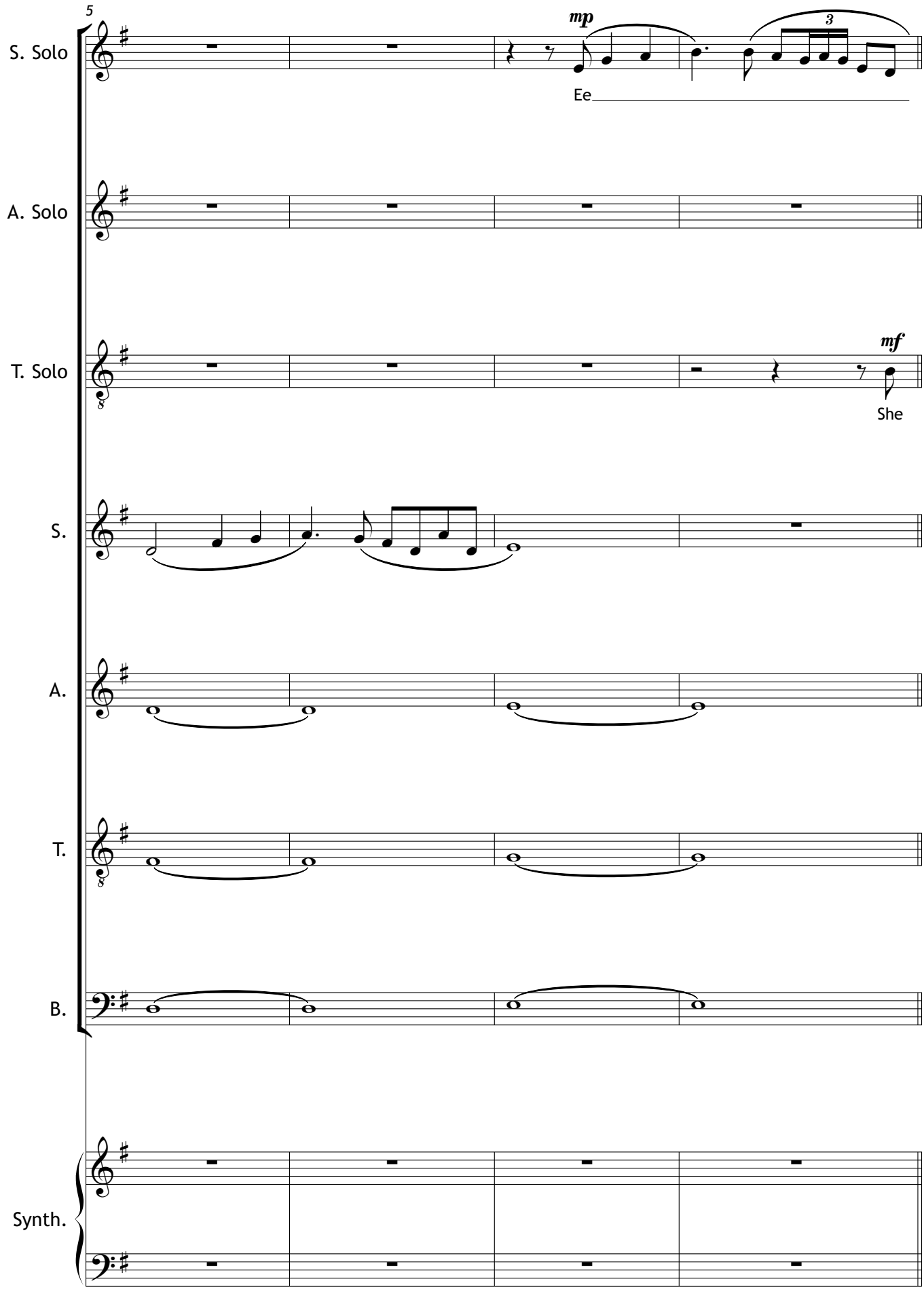

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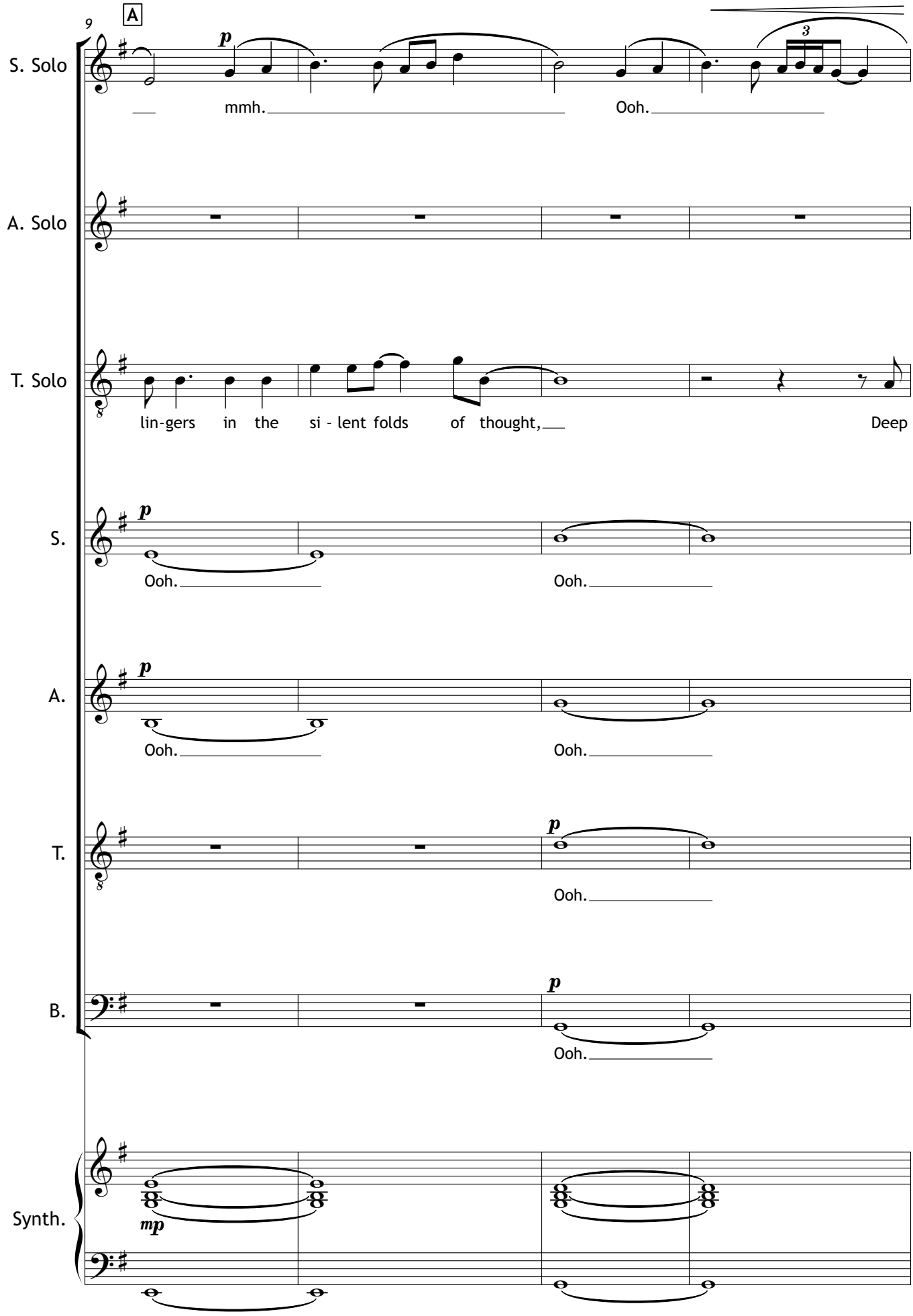

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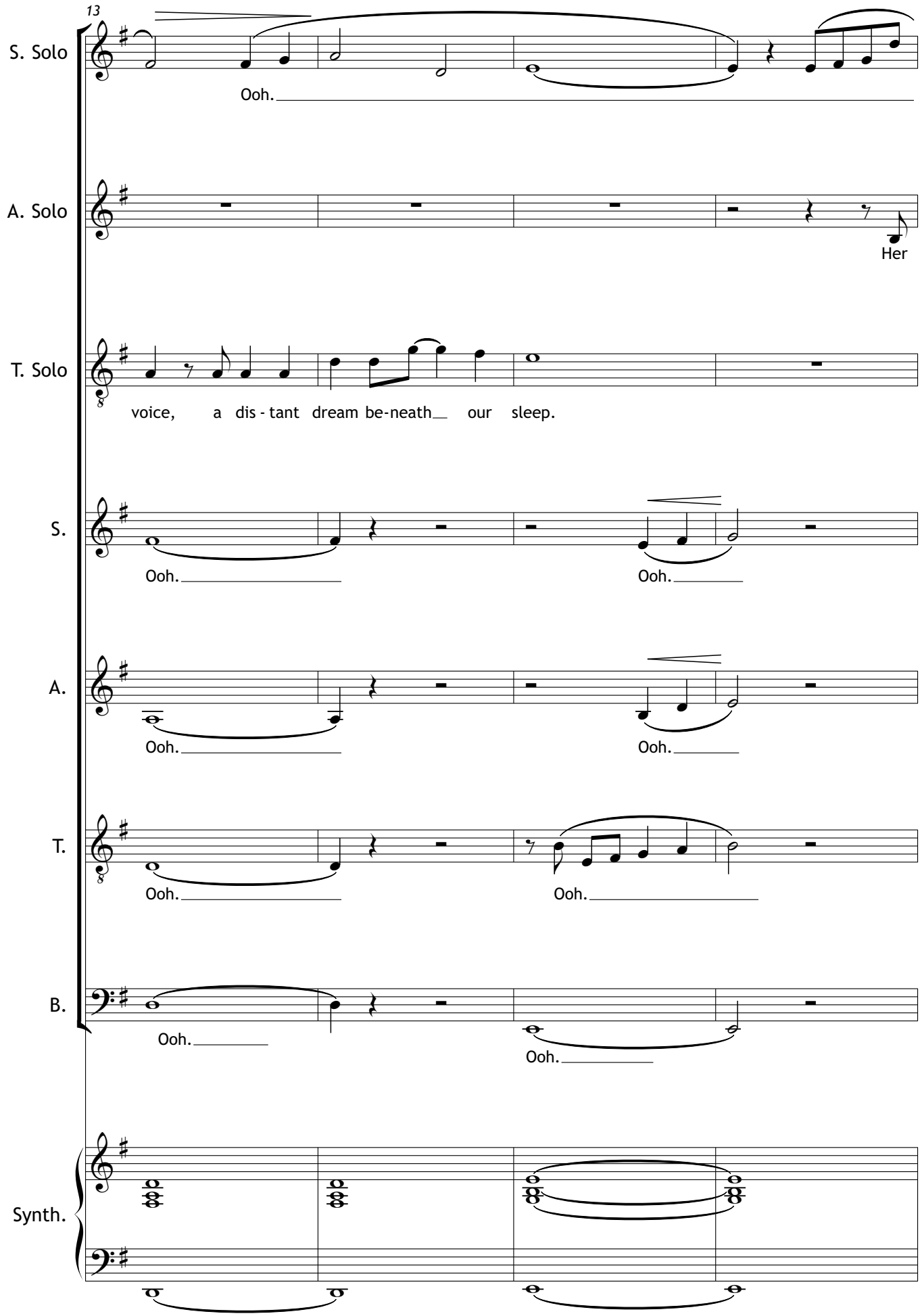

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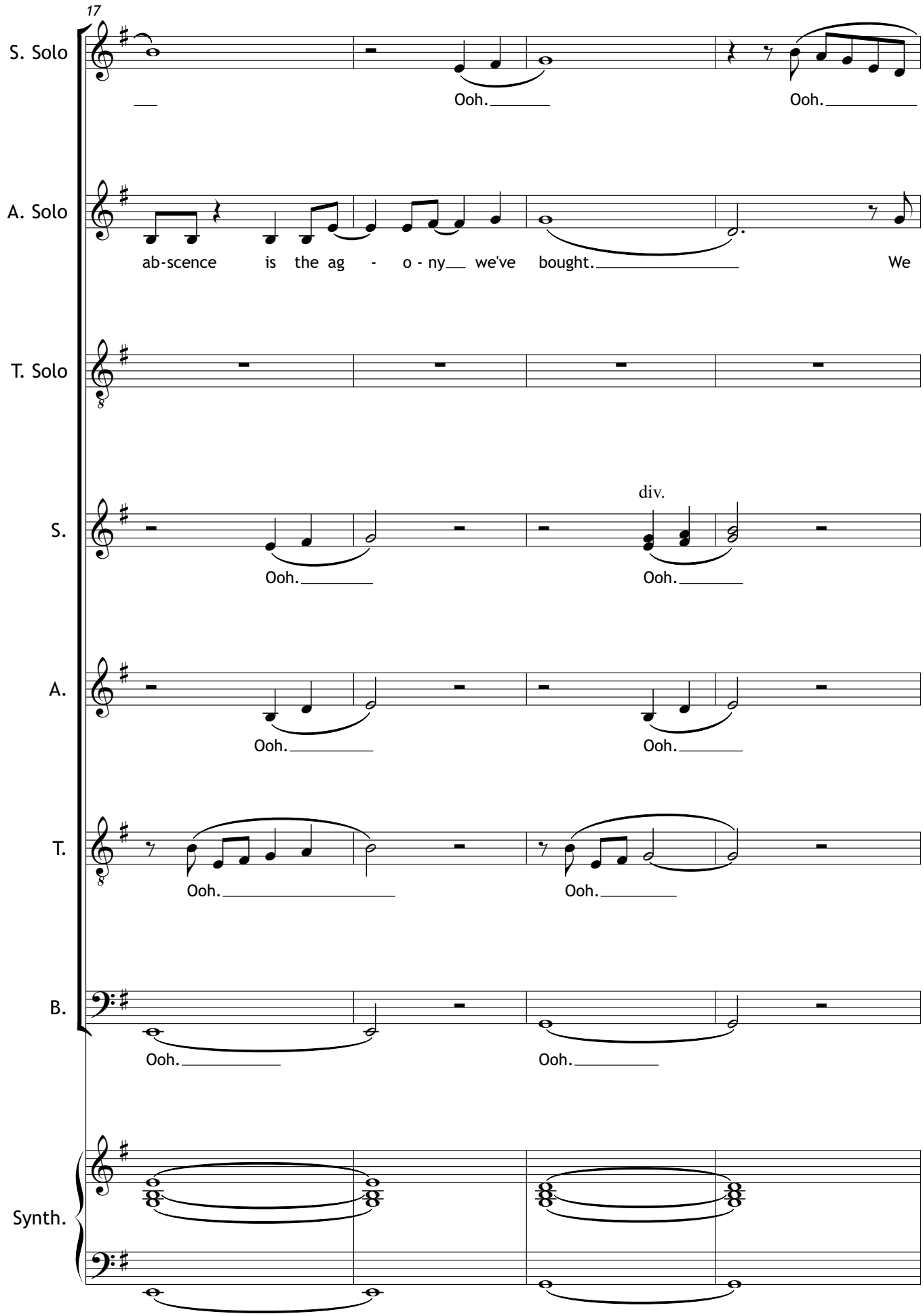

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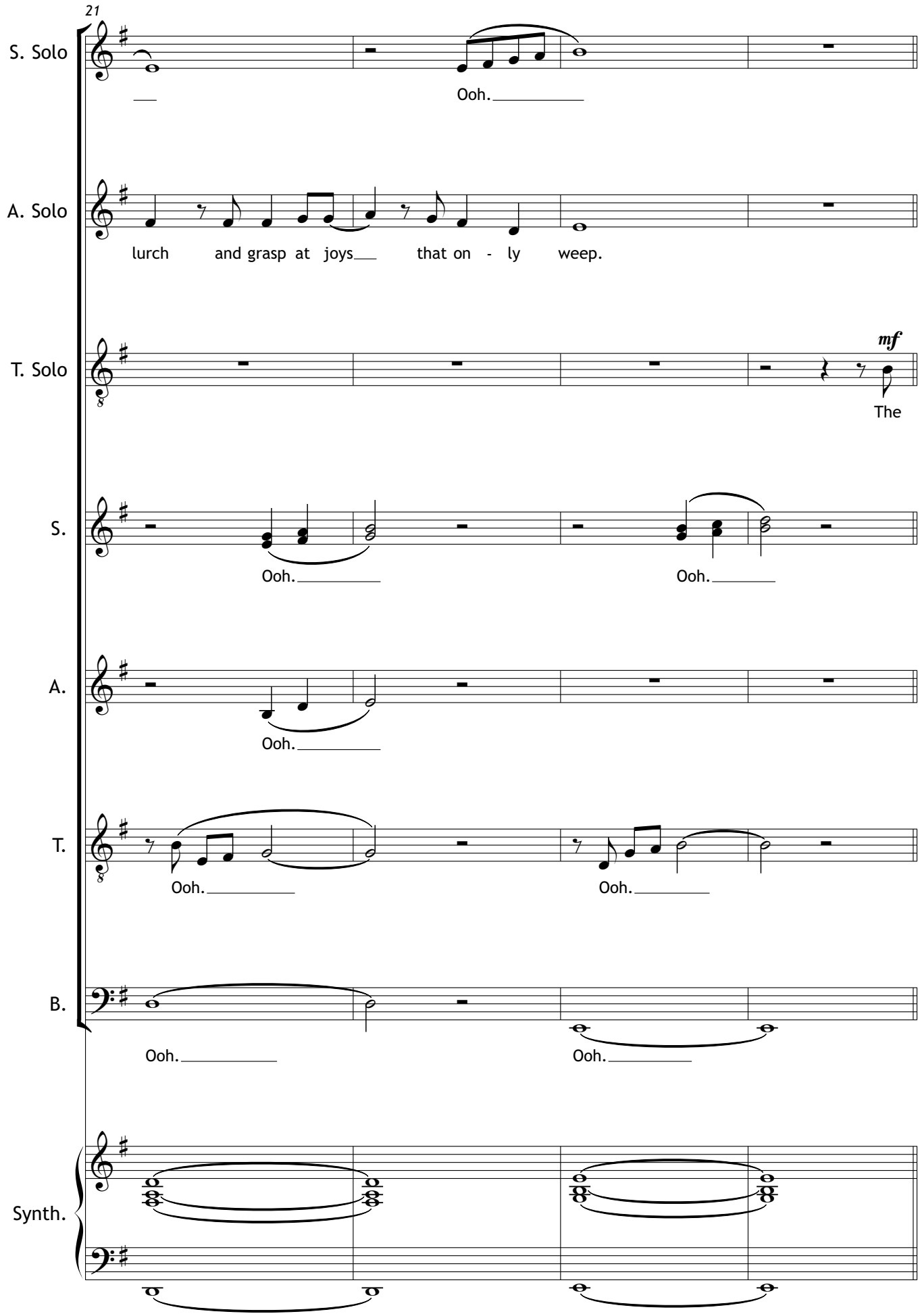

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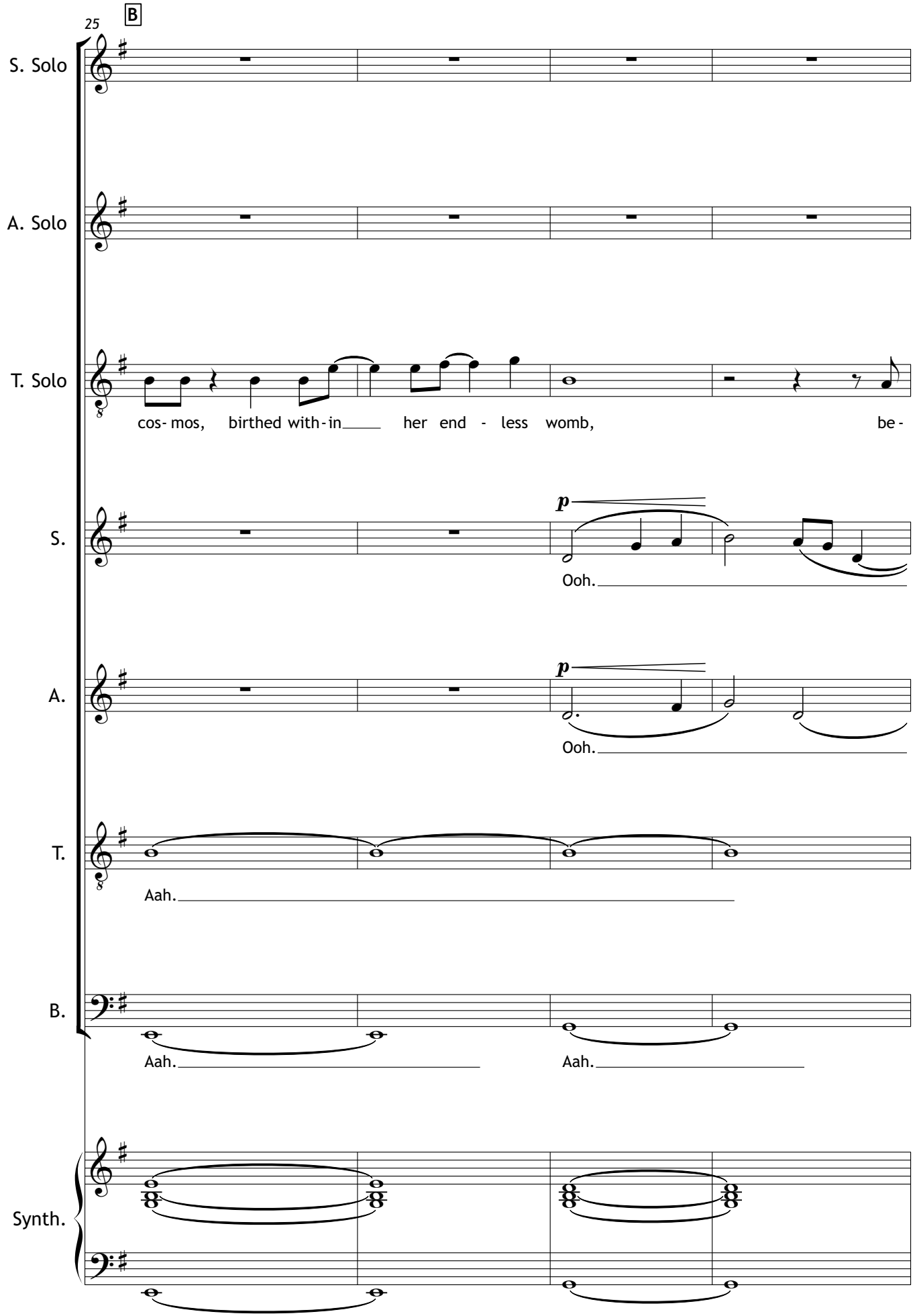

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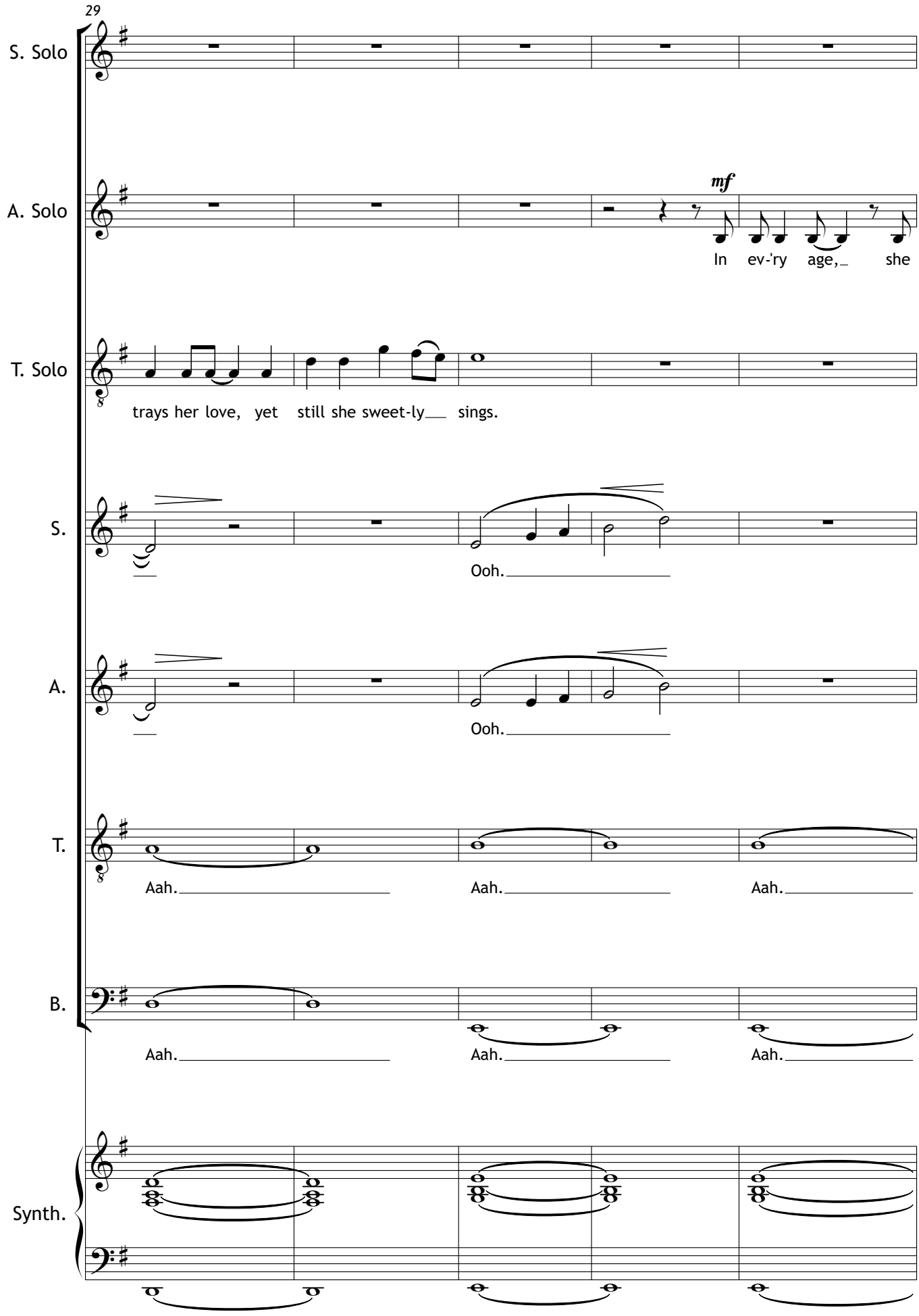

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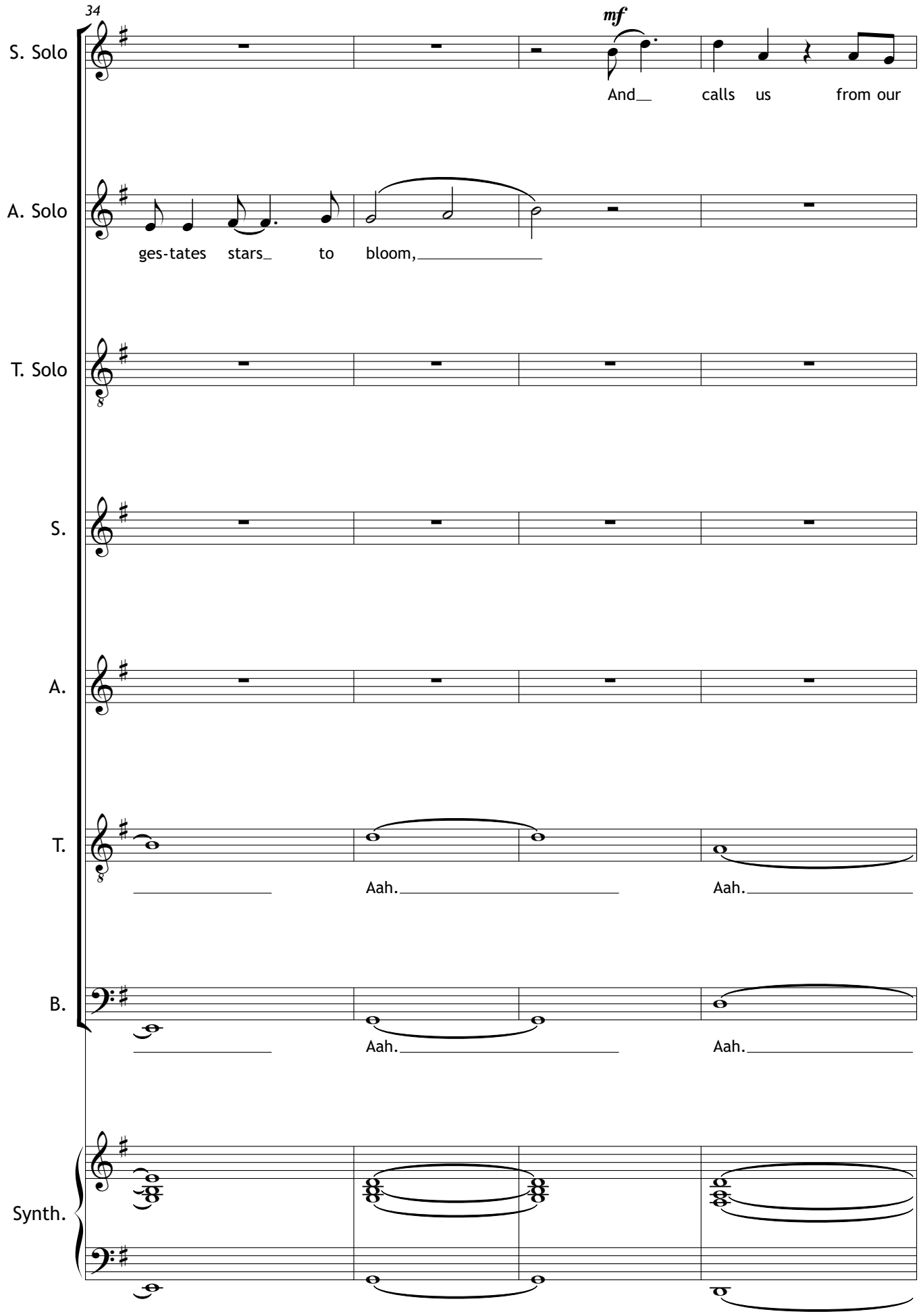

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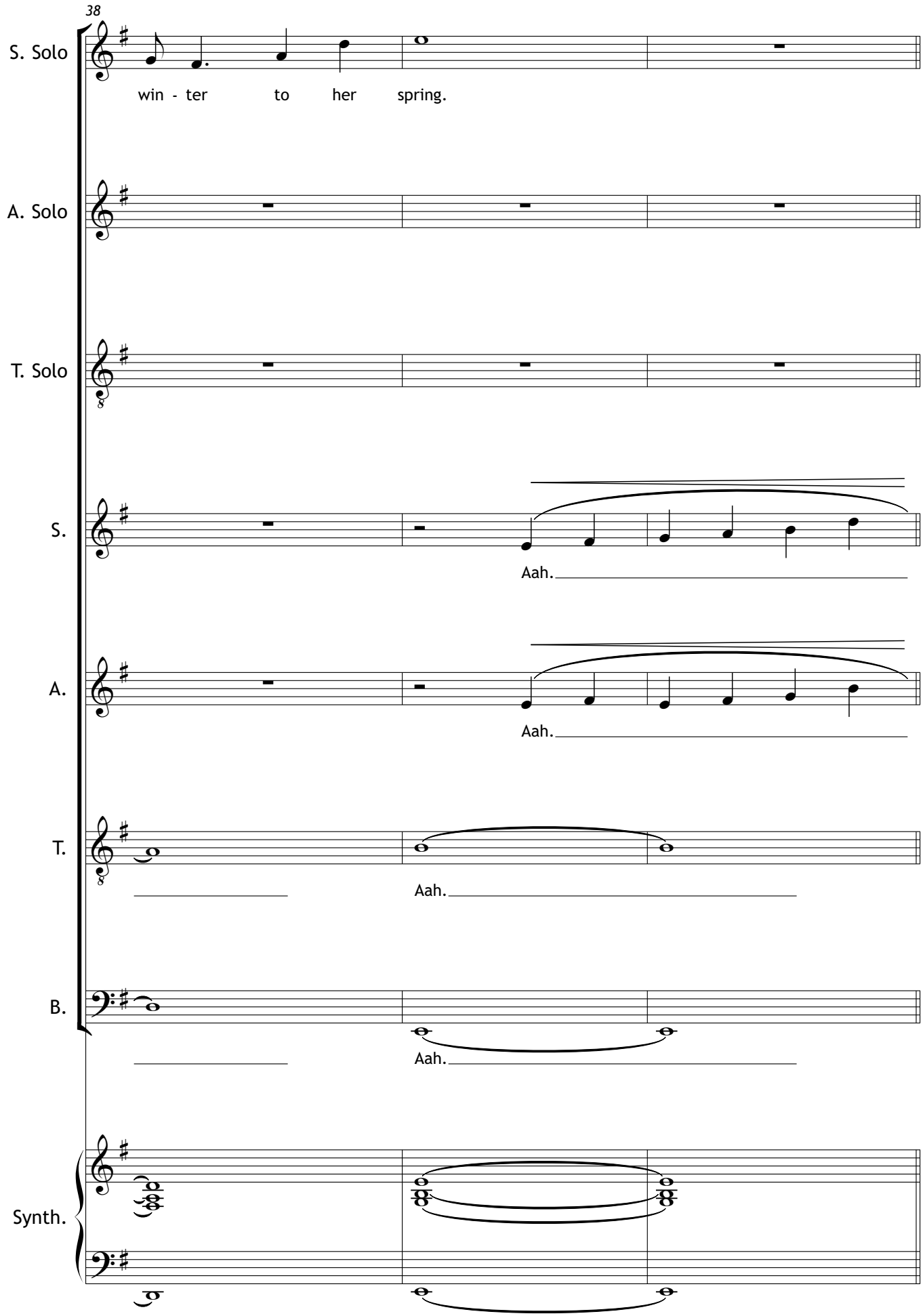

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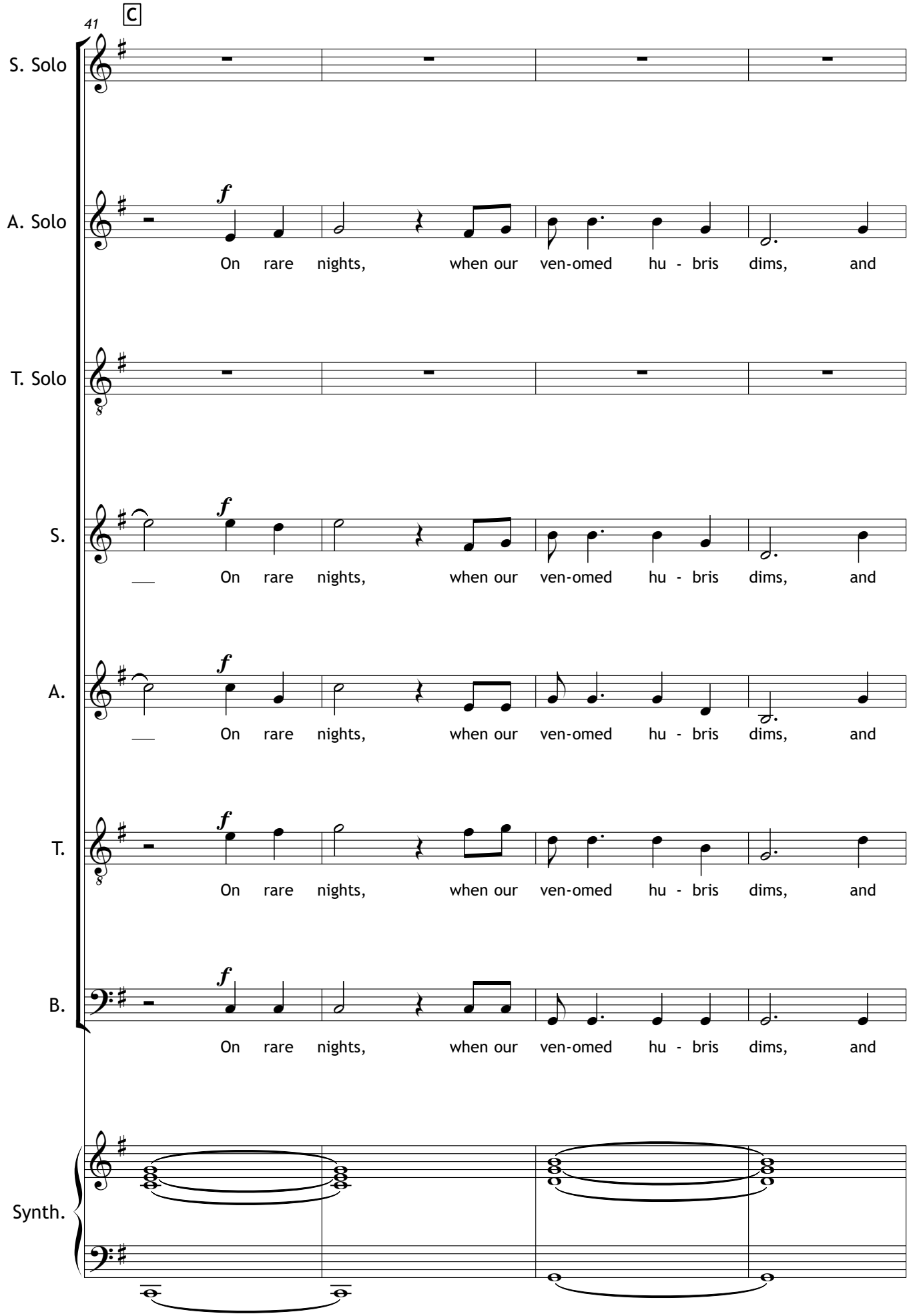

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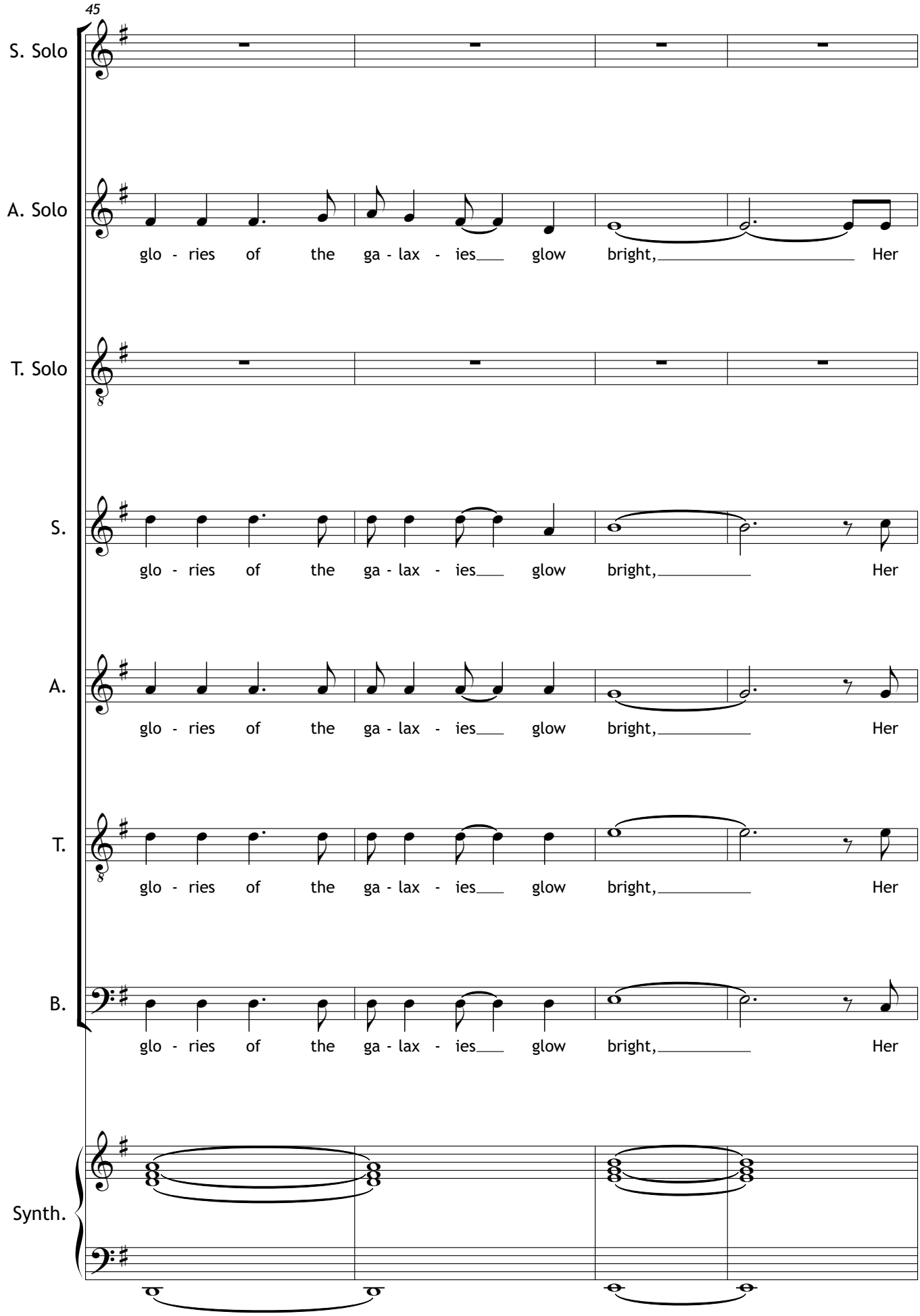

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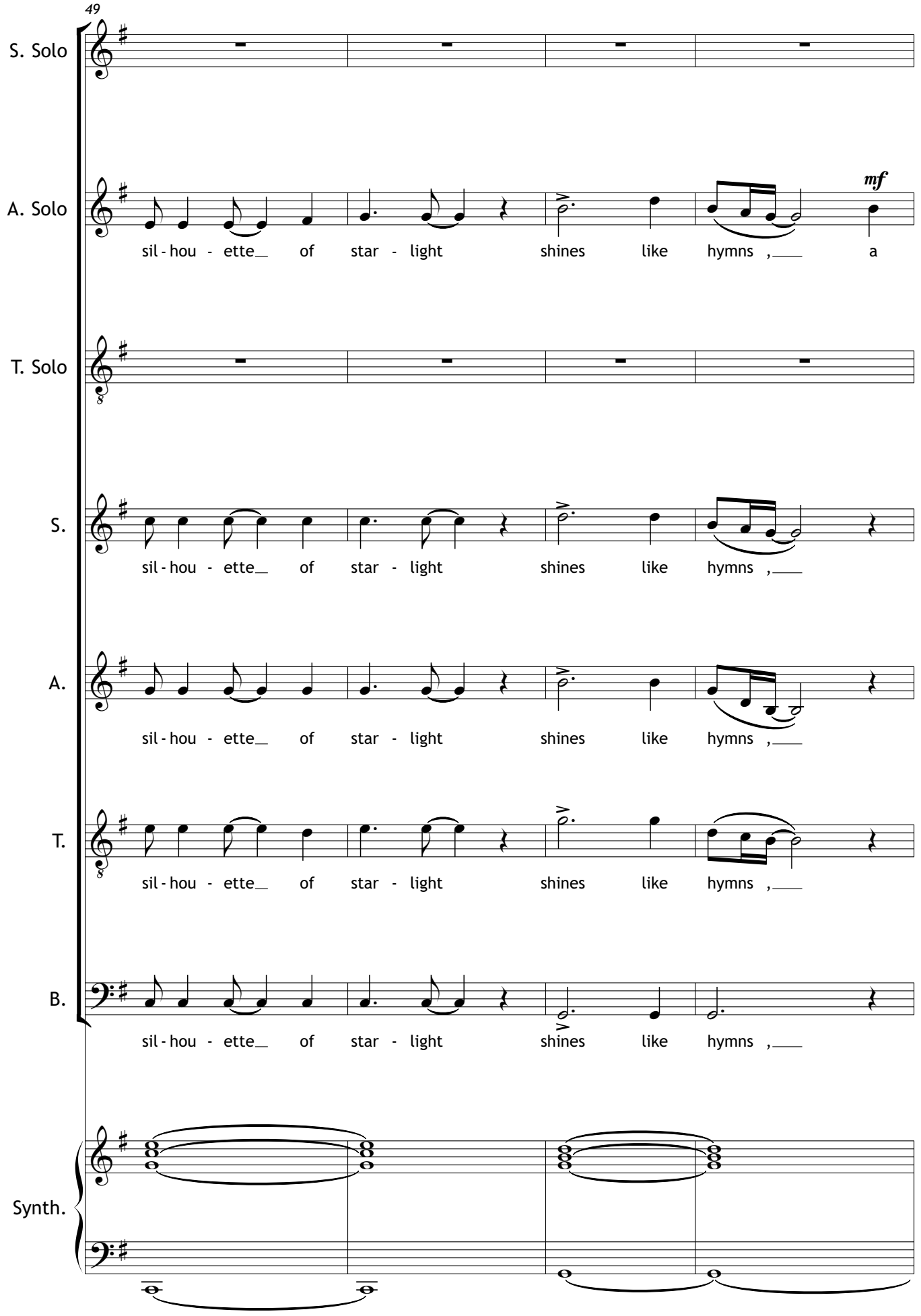

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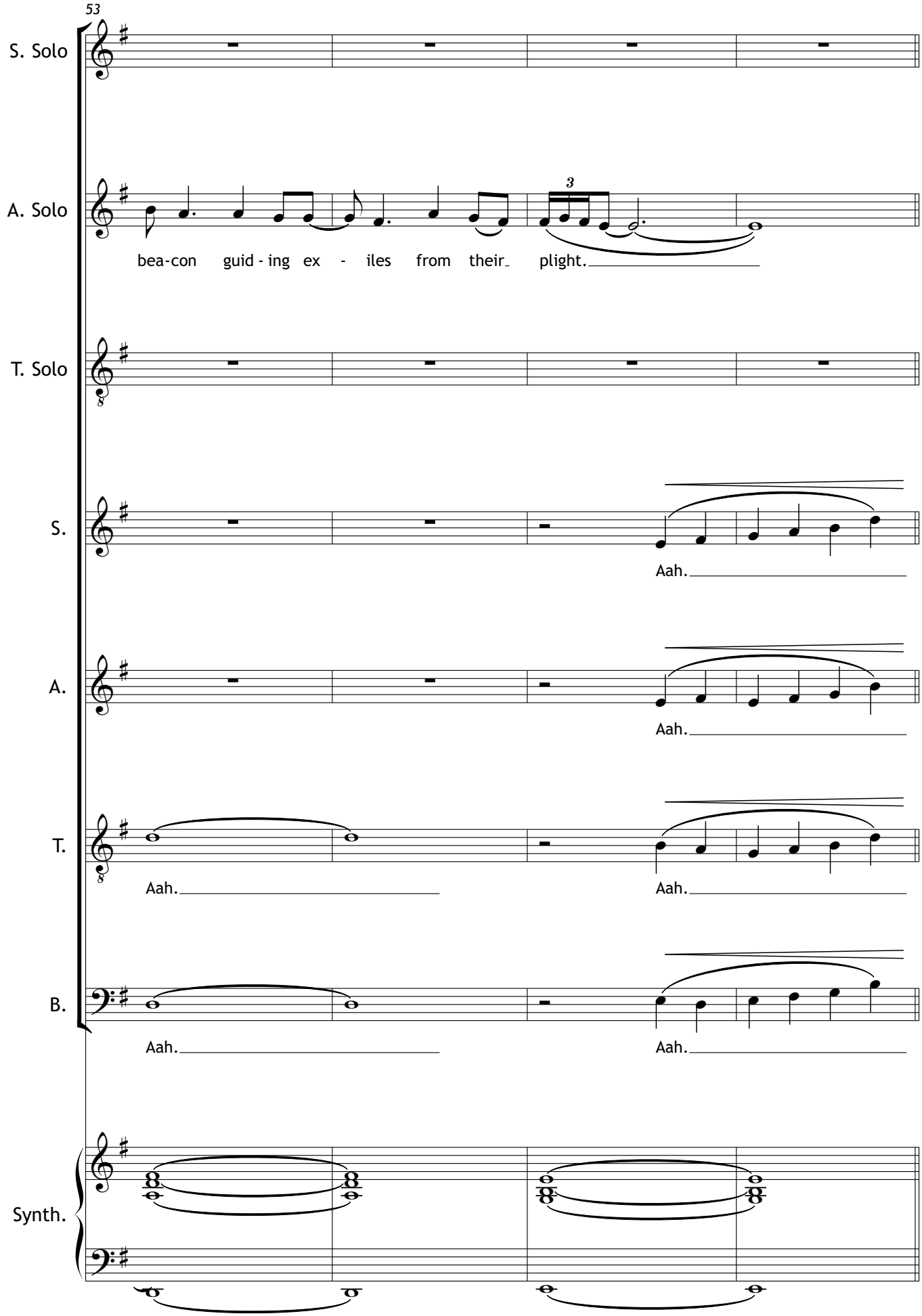

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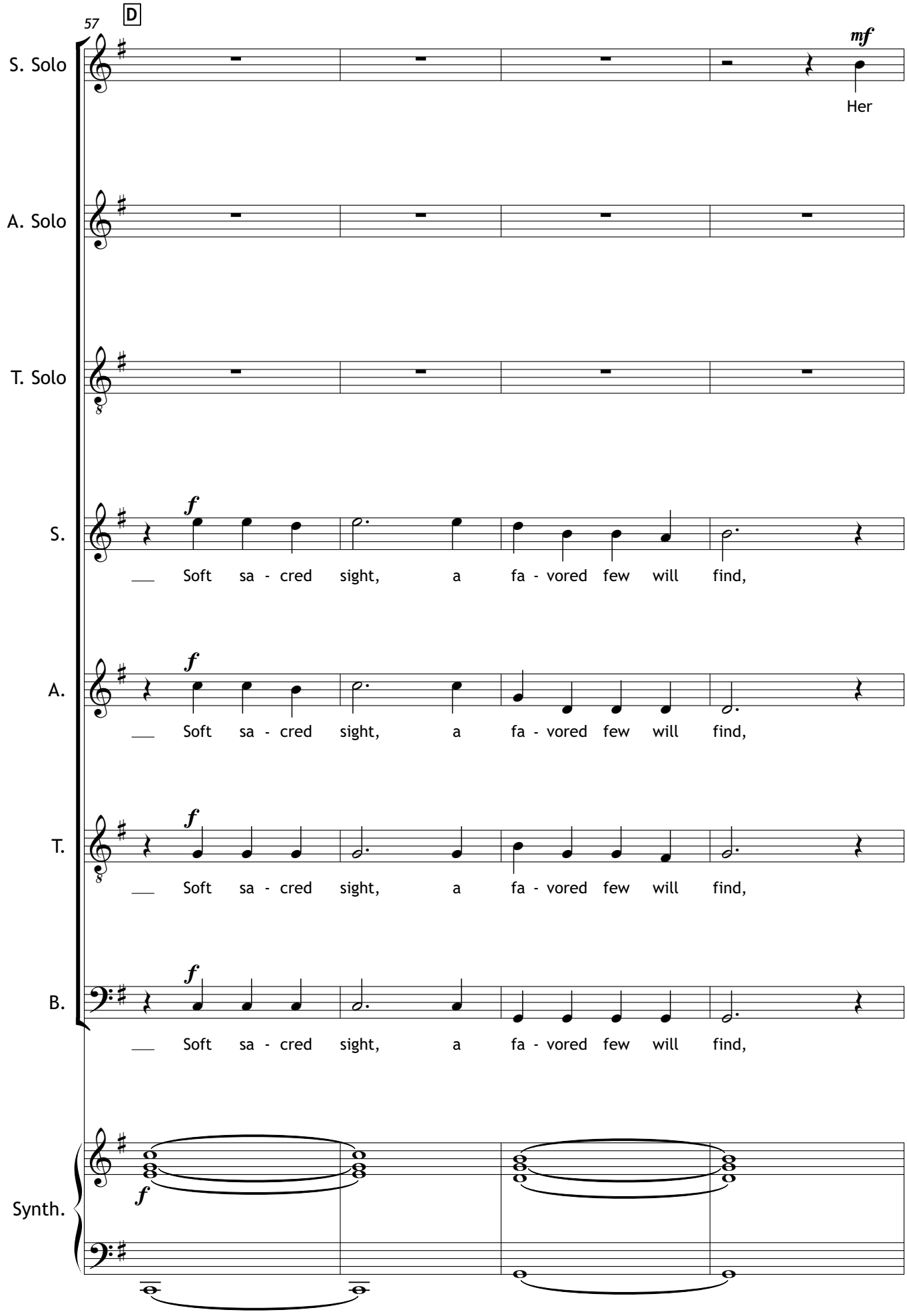

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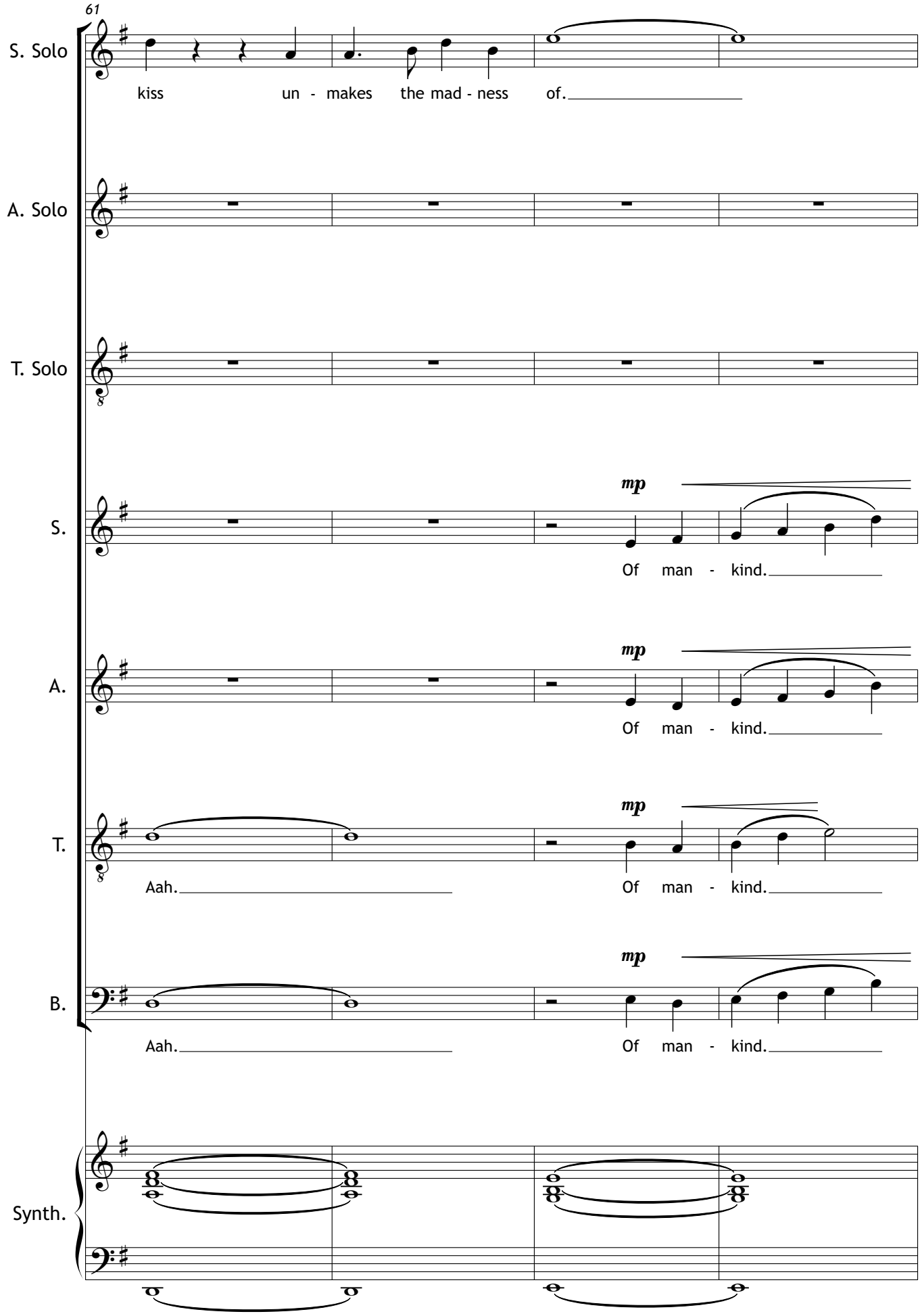

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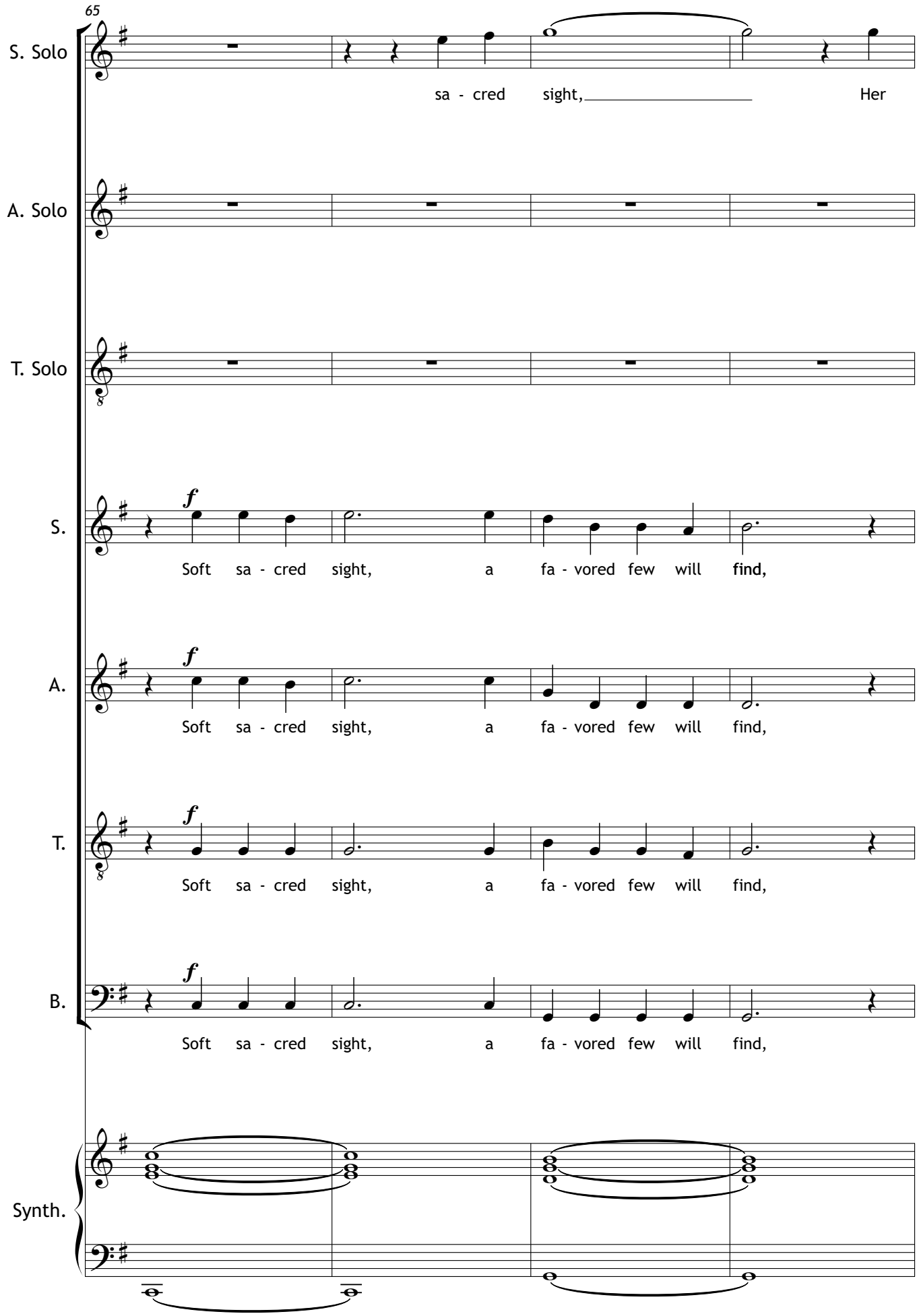

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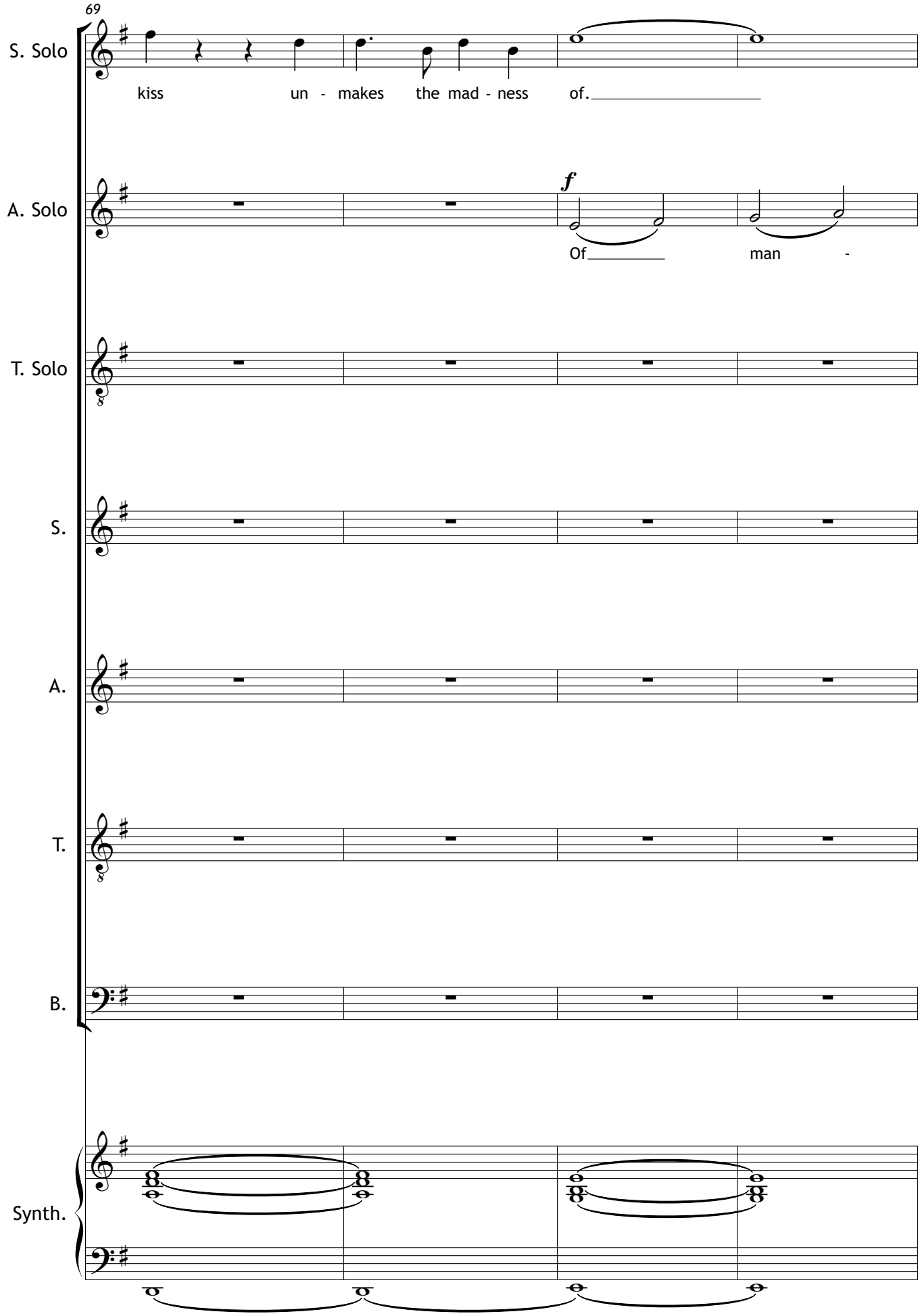

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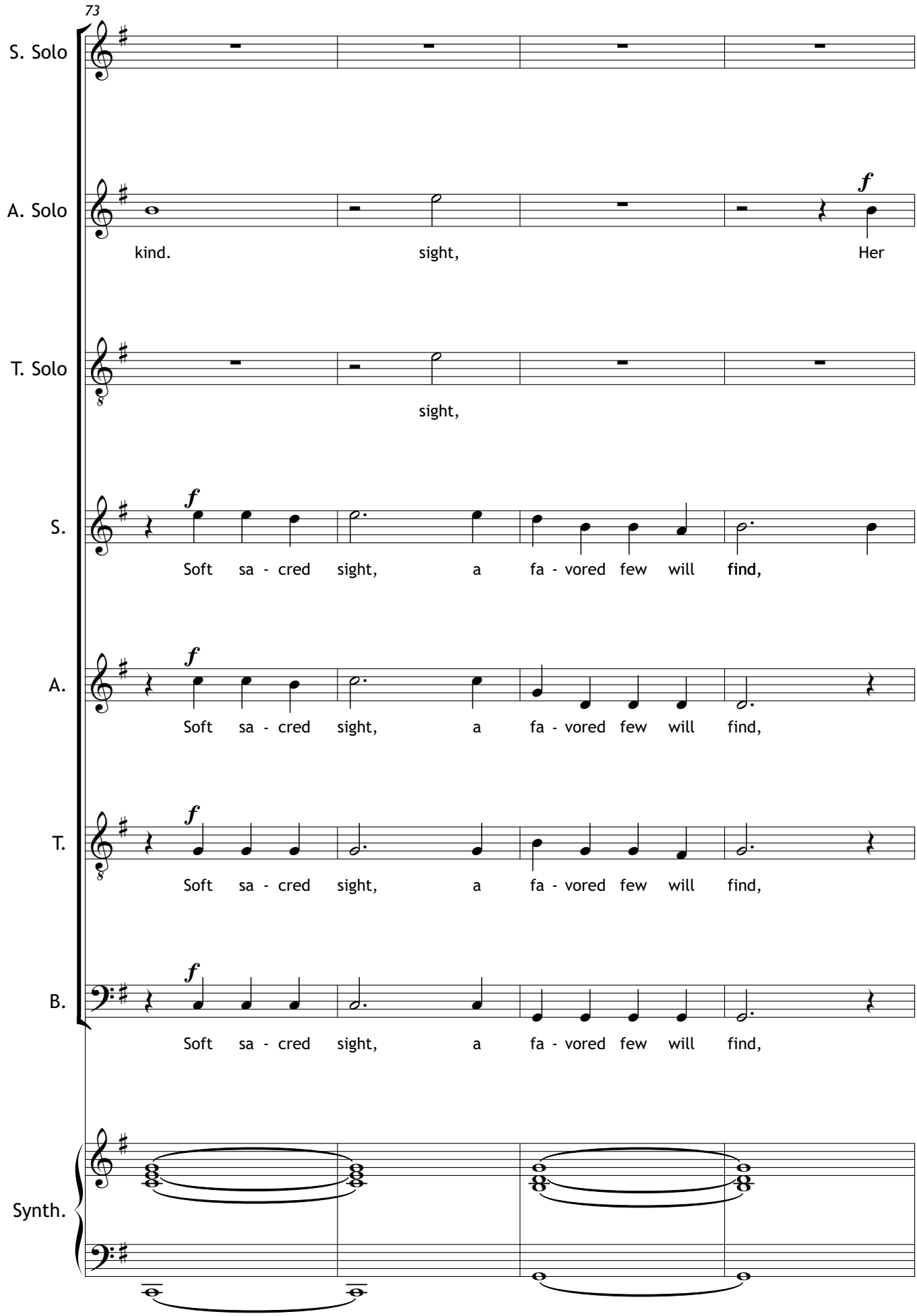

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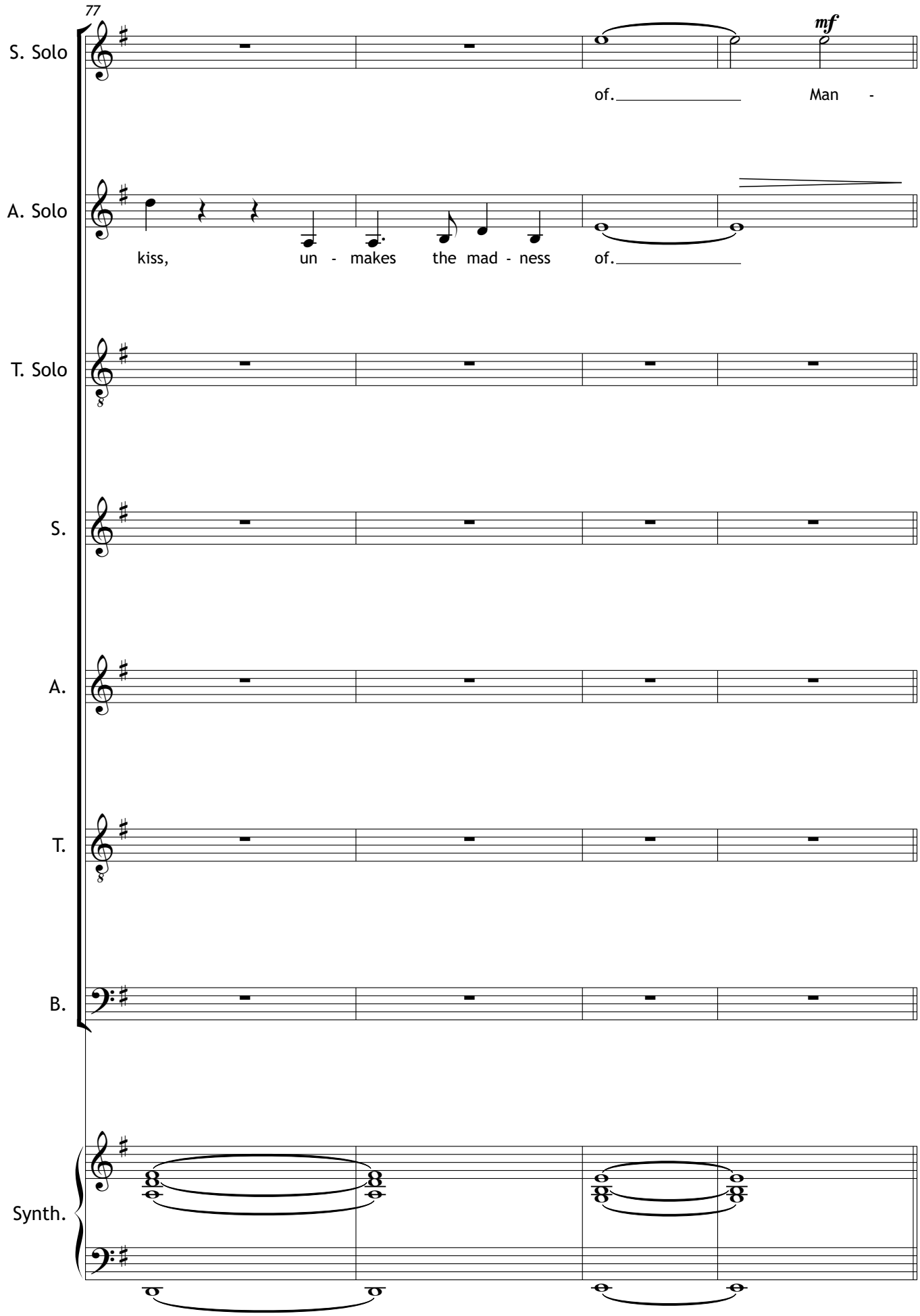

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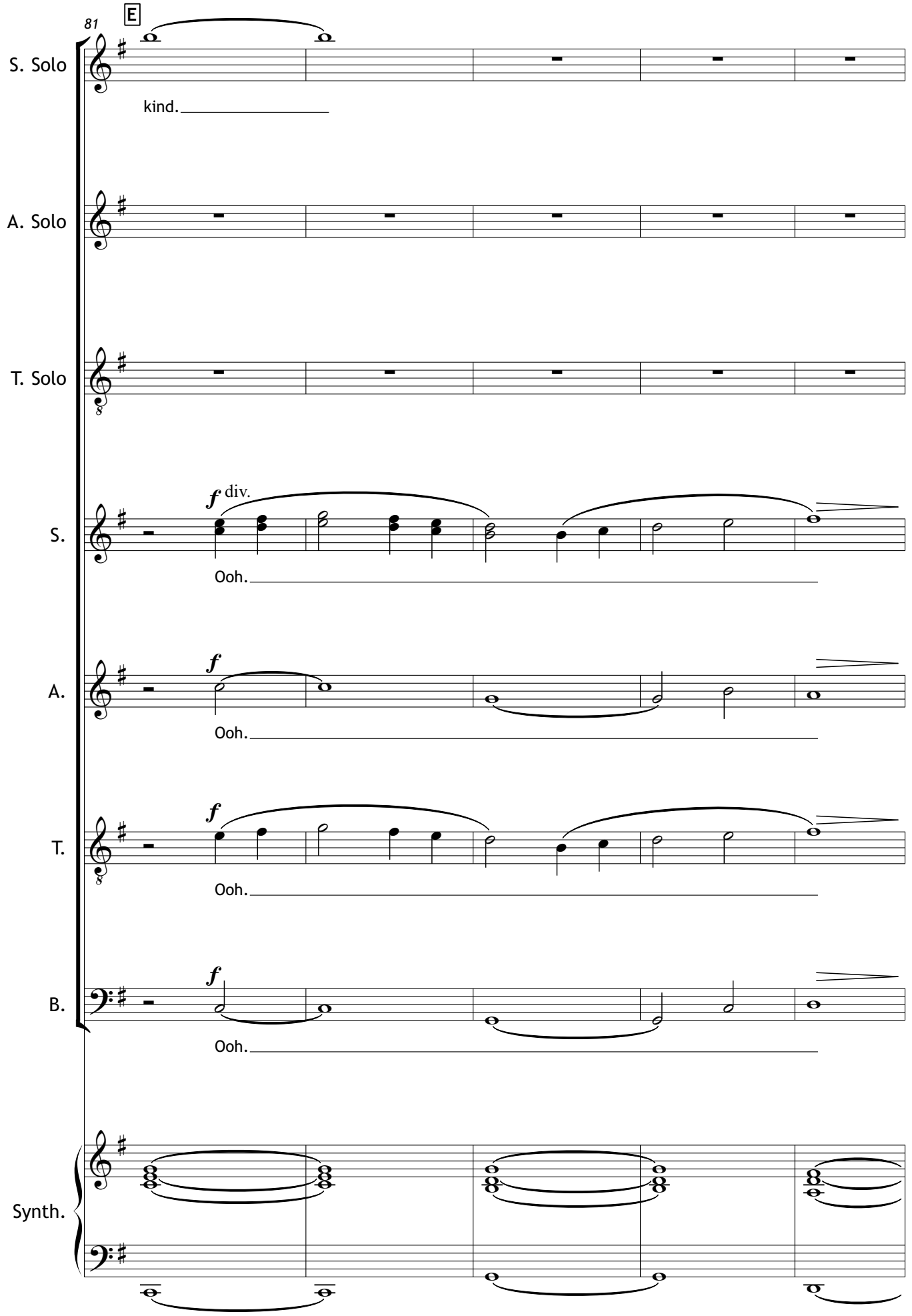

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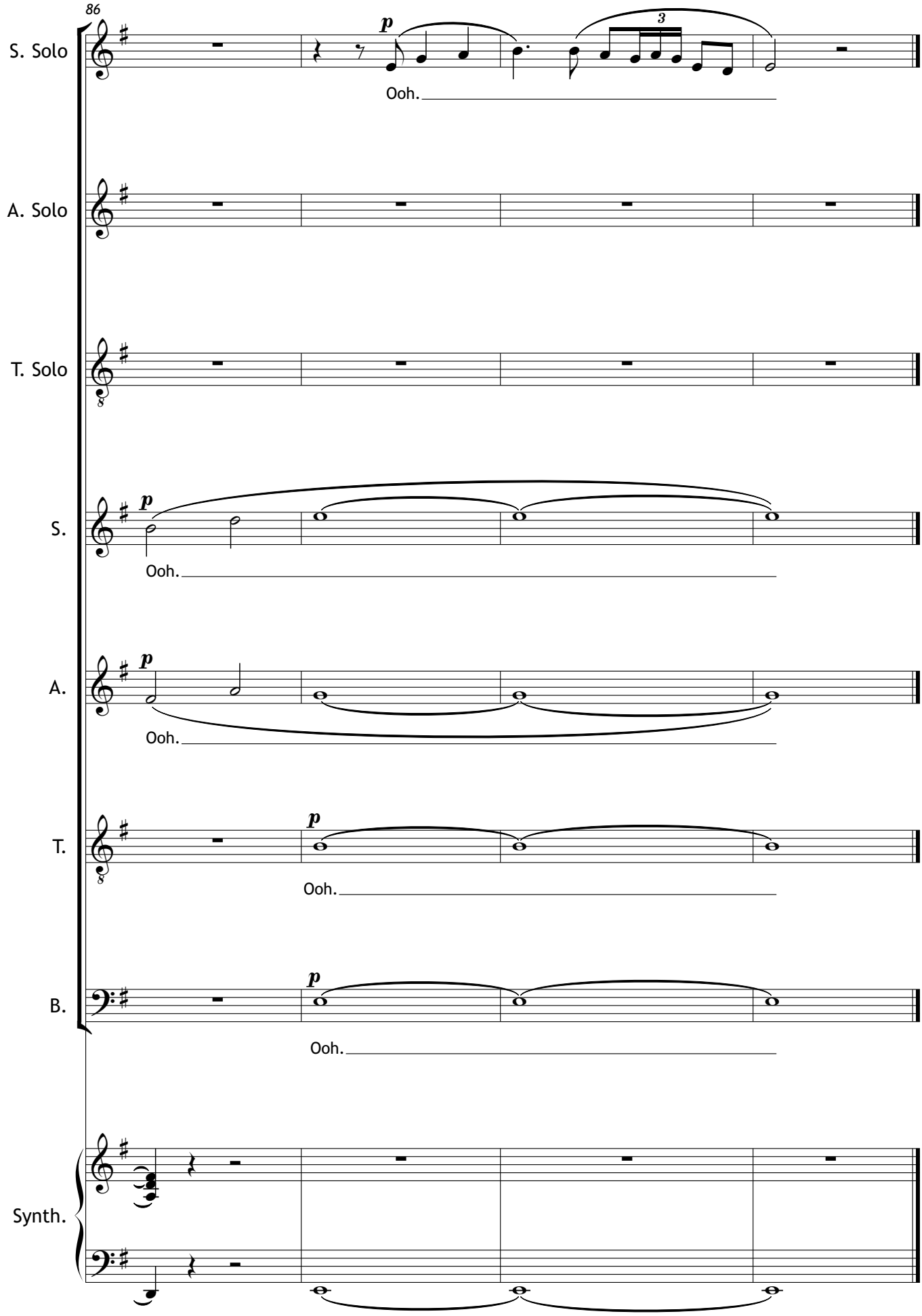

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IV. Transfiguration

Here the devotee argues that his mantras, his dogmas, his hymnals and *"masticated shards of time"* (*Mantra*) are not ideas he invents, but are from the Stargirl, *"her thoughts, transcending hollow lies."* Here is his proselytization, his plea for others to *"soar above our long defeat"* where they are *"enslaved beneath the black deceit."* Echoing his own precipitous fall, he notes that *"until all's lost, there's nothing can be found,"* and that despite our destructive and mortal *"rot,"* the Stargirl's essence is salvific, where

Child's eyes rekindle magic memories;
Mind beacons through dread darkness as our guide.
Incurable disease tastes remedies,
As she unearths sunk keys we lock inside.

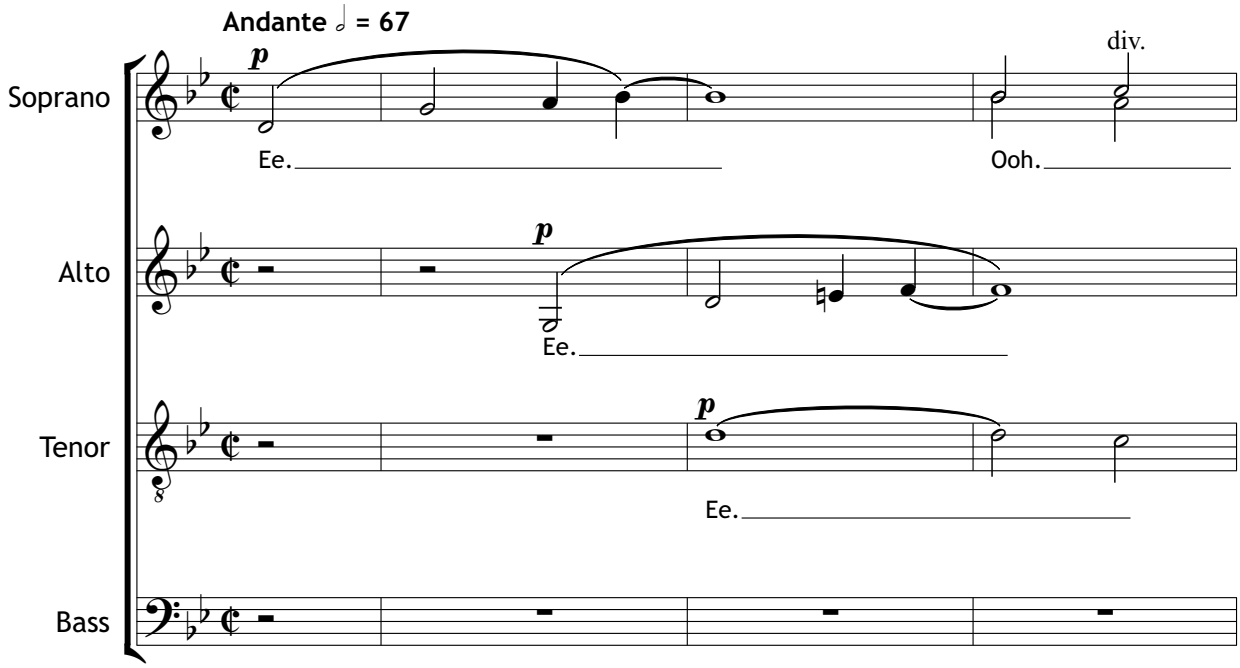
He challenges his listeners to heed her call, so that *"our ever-nightmare, drunk in death's throes, breaks"* and through the verse he has written, transformation and salvation can be found: *"we, through sacred songs, dare dream to wake."*

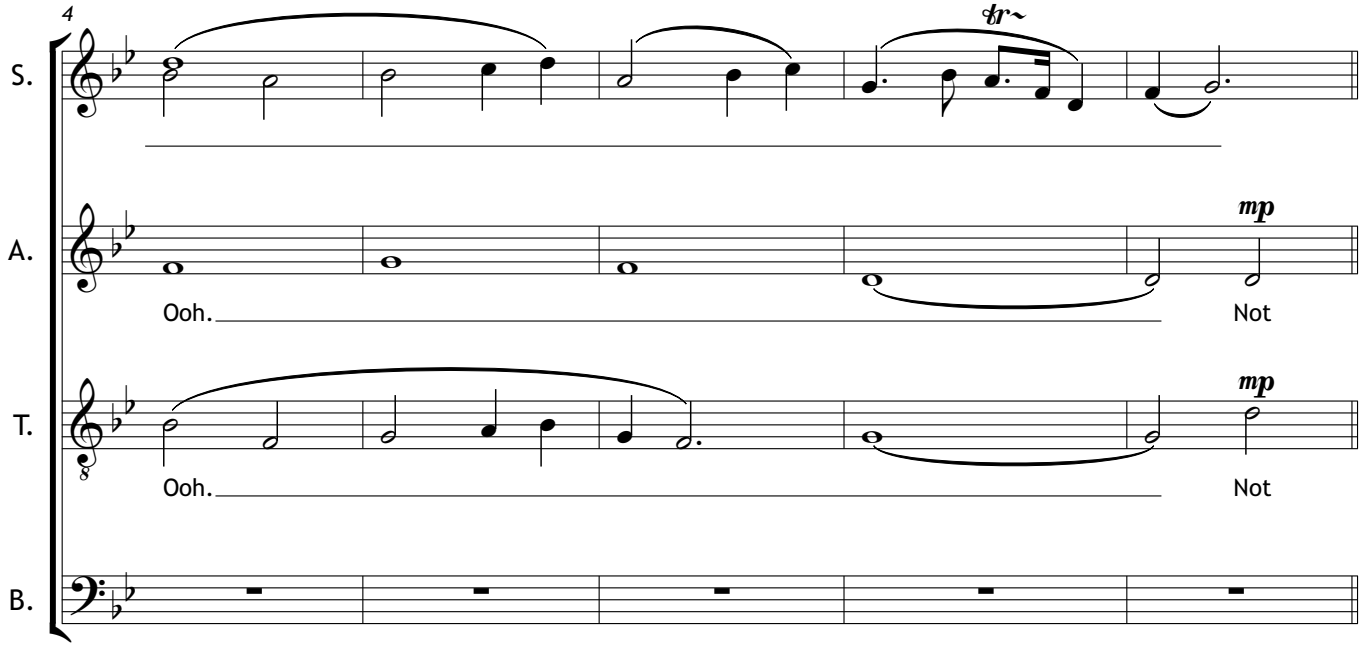
Transfiguration

Scripture: Item 6 of "Tome of Stars"

Stargazer

Vocal Ensemble





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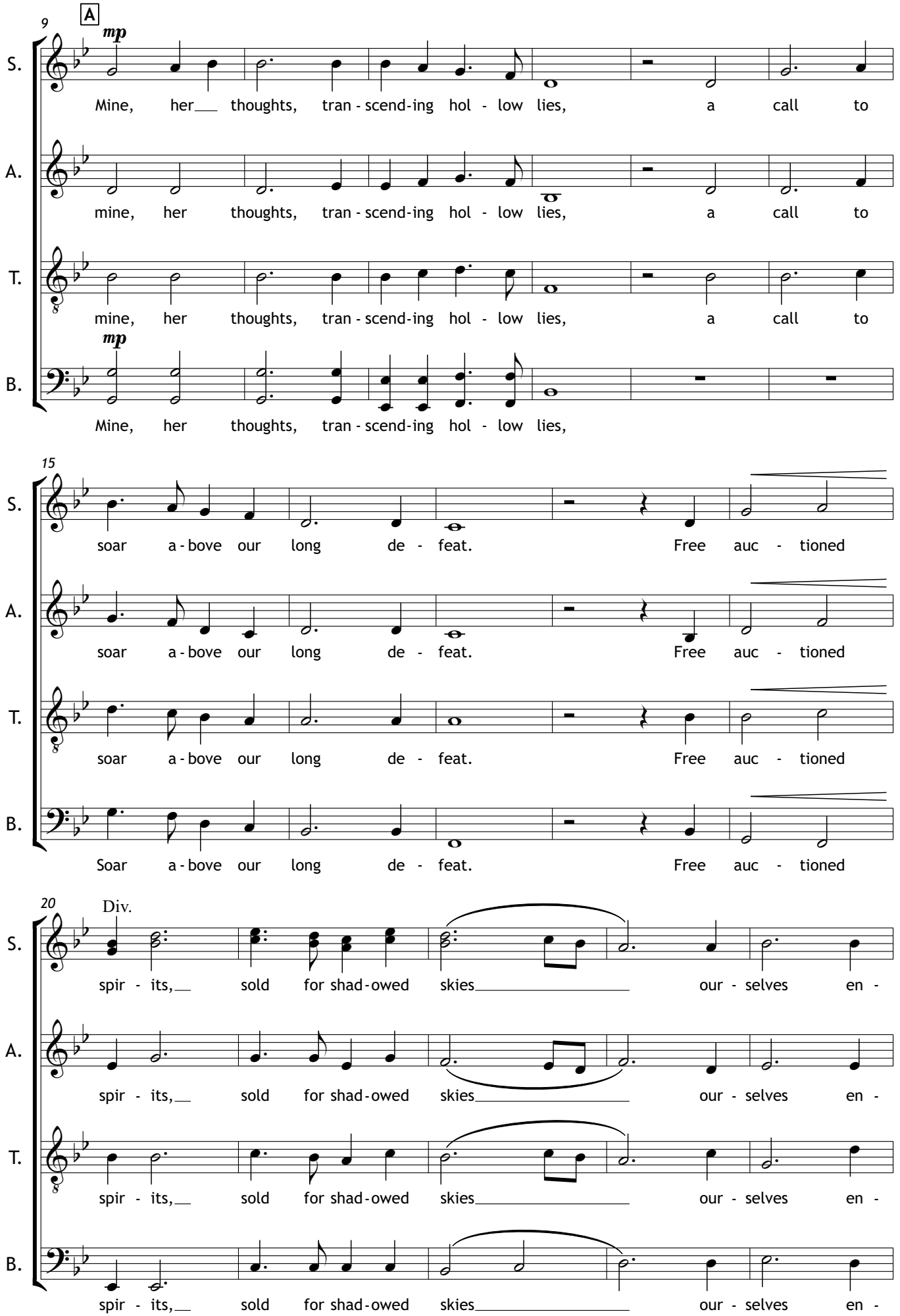

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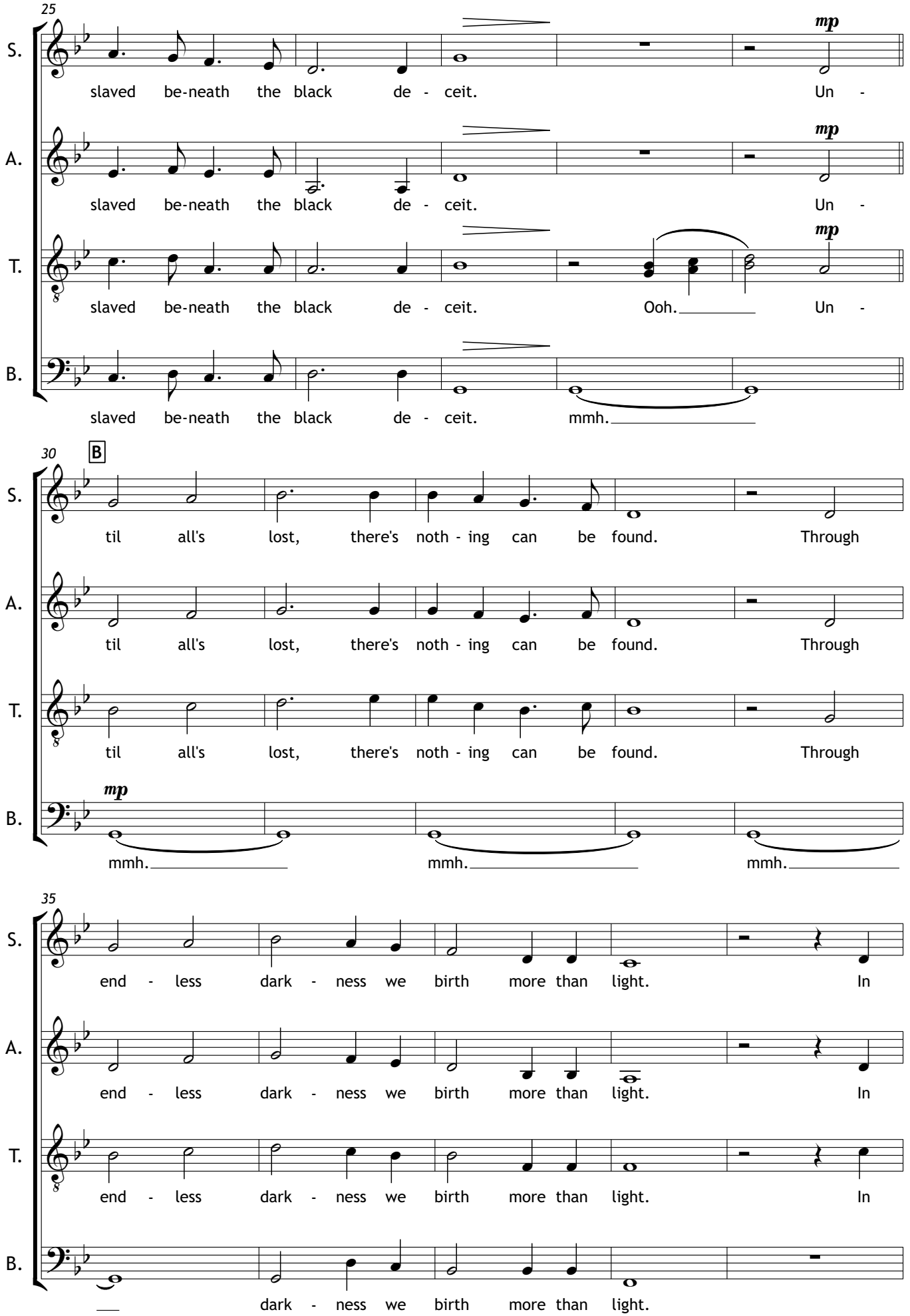

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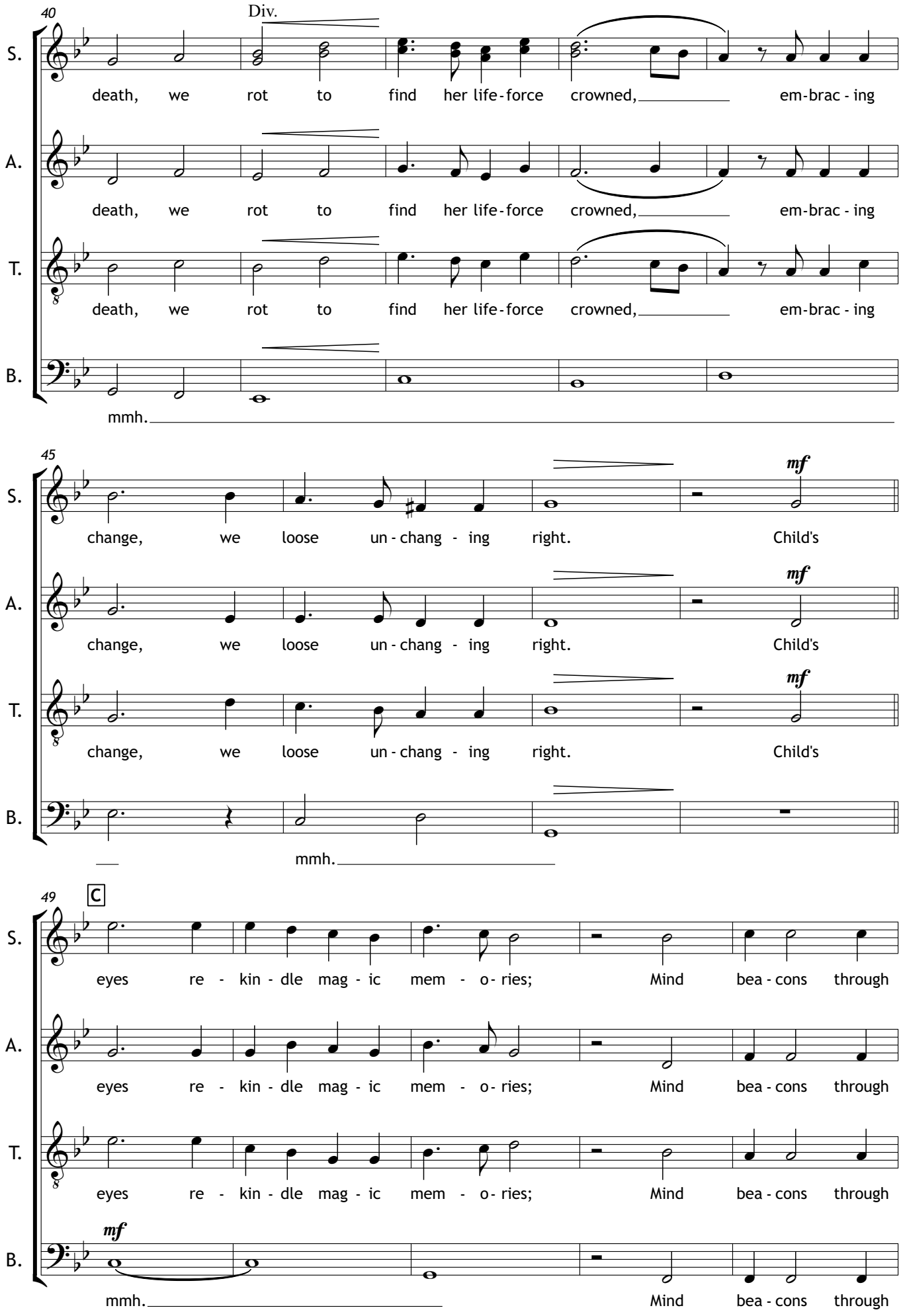
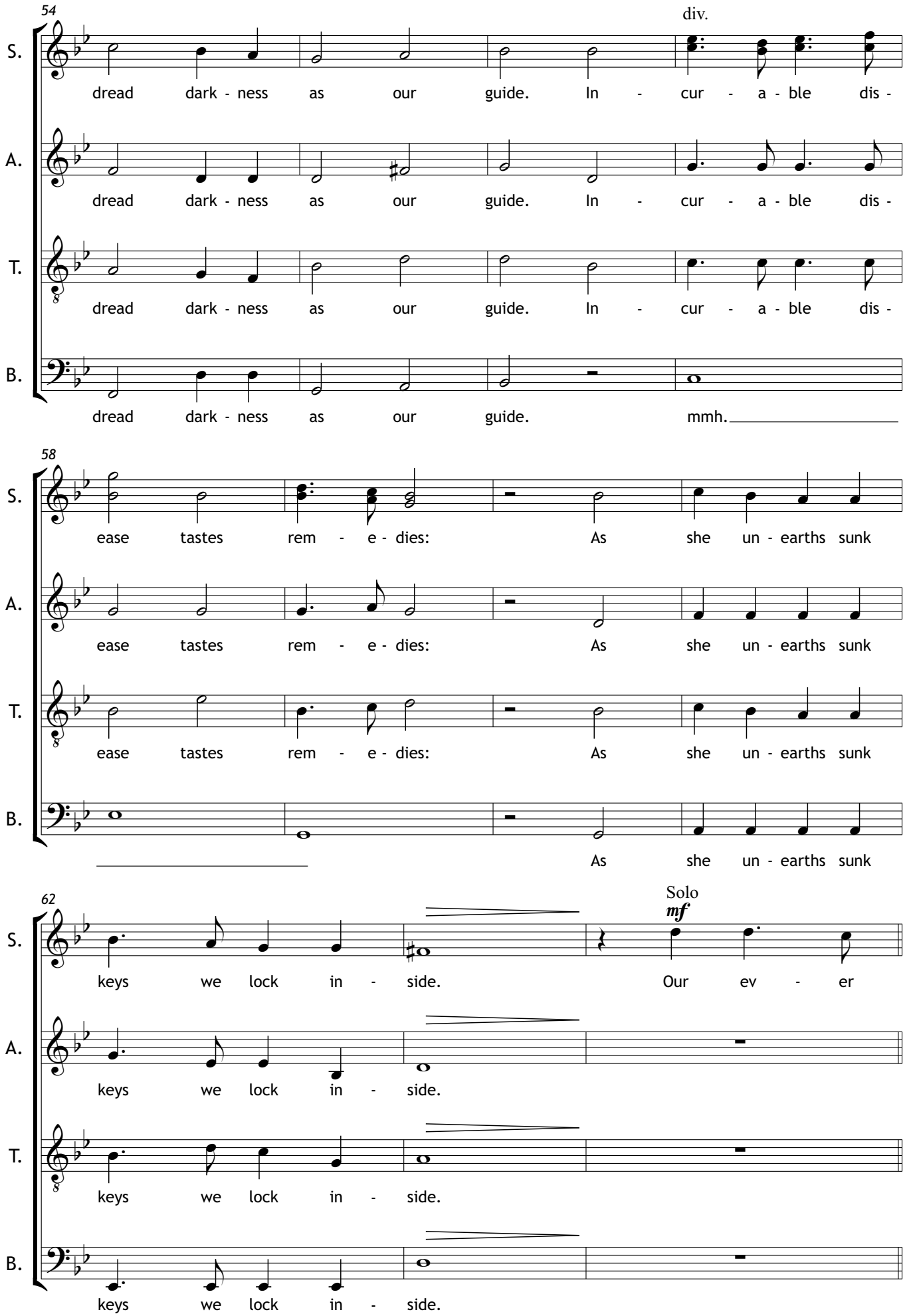

40
Div.
S.
death, we rot to find her life-force crowned, em-brac - ing
A.
death, we rot to find her life-force crowned, em-brac - ing
T.
death, we rot to find her life-force crowned, em-brac - ing
B.
mmh.
45
mf
S.
change, we loose un - chang - ing right. Child's
A.
change, we loose un - chang - ing right. Child's
T.
change, we loose un - chang - ing right. Child's
B.
mmh.
49
C
S.
eyes re - kin - dle mag - ic mem - o - ries; Mind bea - cons through
A.
eyes re - kin - dle mag - ic mem - o - ries; Mind bea - cons through
T.
eyes re - kin - dle mag - ic mem - o - ries; Mind bea - cons through
mf
B.
mmh. Mind bea - cons through



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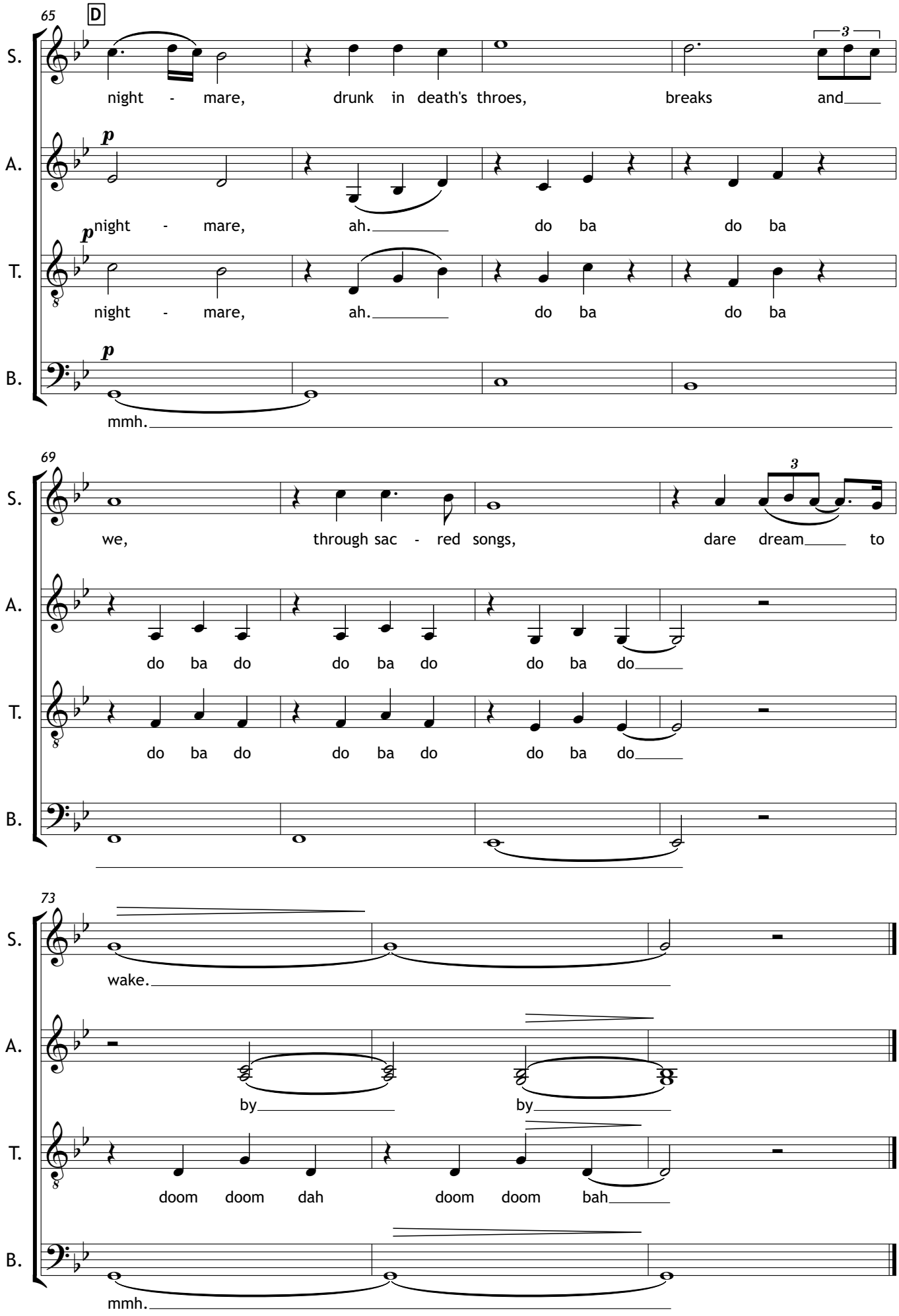

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18. Mangalam

In a Bharatanatyam recital, the mangalam (from the Sanskrit word *mangala*, meaning something close to "blessed" or "auspicious"), is often a serene finale, a brief, reverent piece that acts as a spiritual coda to the dance performance. In music and choreography, the mangalam is usually a restrained and simple item, devotional, with lyrics praising specific deities, gurus, musicians, and the audience.

This is the final poem of *Item 6* of *Tome of Stars: Scripture*. It encompasses the idea of indefinite *quixotosis* (a sustained state of paradox of impractical idealism) most directly: *"To ever love, though all your love has ceased."* The sonnet begins with the devotee *"each dawn"* draping *"devotions cross the void,"* as his heart "*beseeches you who kindles stars"* (another reference to Varda from Tolkien). Thus every day he reaches out to the Stargirl, pouring his affection into the *"void,"* calling to her who is the bringer of light in his personal mythology. But he hears nothing, his love *"unreturned,"* so that his *"spirit falls, destroyed."* Despite this unmaking rejection and emptiness, he continues his petitions, even if the divine seems cruel.

But it is not remotely out of hope. Hope has long died so that not a *"glimmer"* remains. He kneels, *"not for salvation or lost peace,"* long-abandoned dreams he knows will never be found, but for something else: an adoration that does not fail, that will *"ever love, though all your love has ceased,"* as his flawed heart *"beats only truth, outcast/A rhythm that no tragedy could slay."*

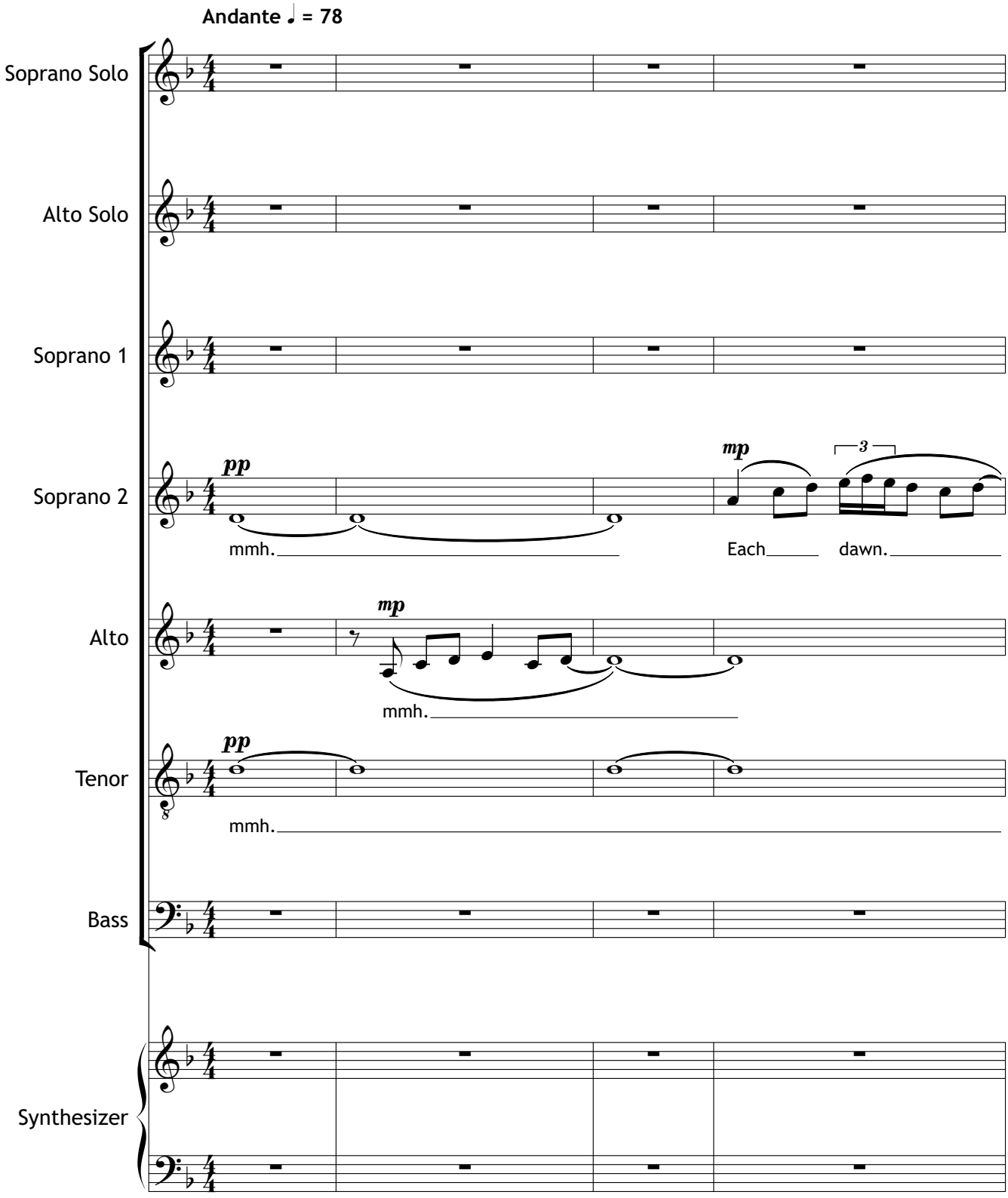
He thus is not simply dedicating himself, not simply vowing, but is imprisoned in a love and need from which no power has freed him, and from which he himself cannot honestly and truly to himself, ever wish to lose. Therefore, he continues impossible, foolish, barren, mad devotion, each day *"carving"* her *"name across my soul,"* so that, by being true to himself and his affection for her, he can meet her in his dreams and fantasies, the only realm left to him in which his diseased and famished soul can be nourished, however poorly, however delusionally offered to a mortal who not does not care about him but who could never have loved him in the transcendent manner he imagines.

Mangalam

Scripture: Item 6 of "Tome of Stars"

Stargazer

Vocal Ensemble



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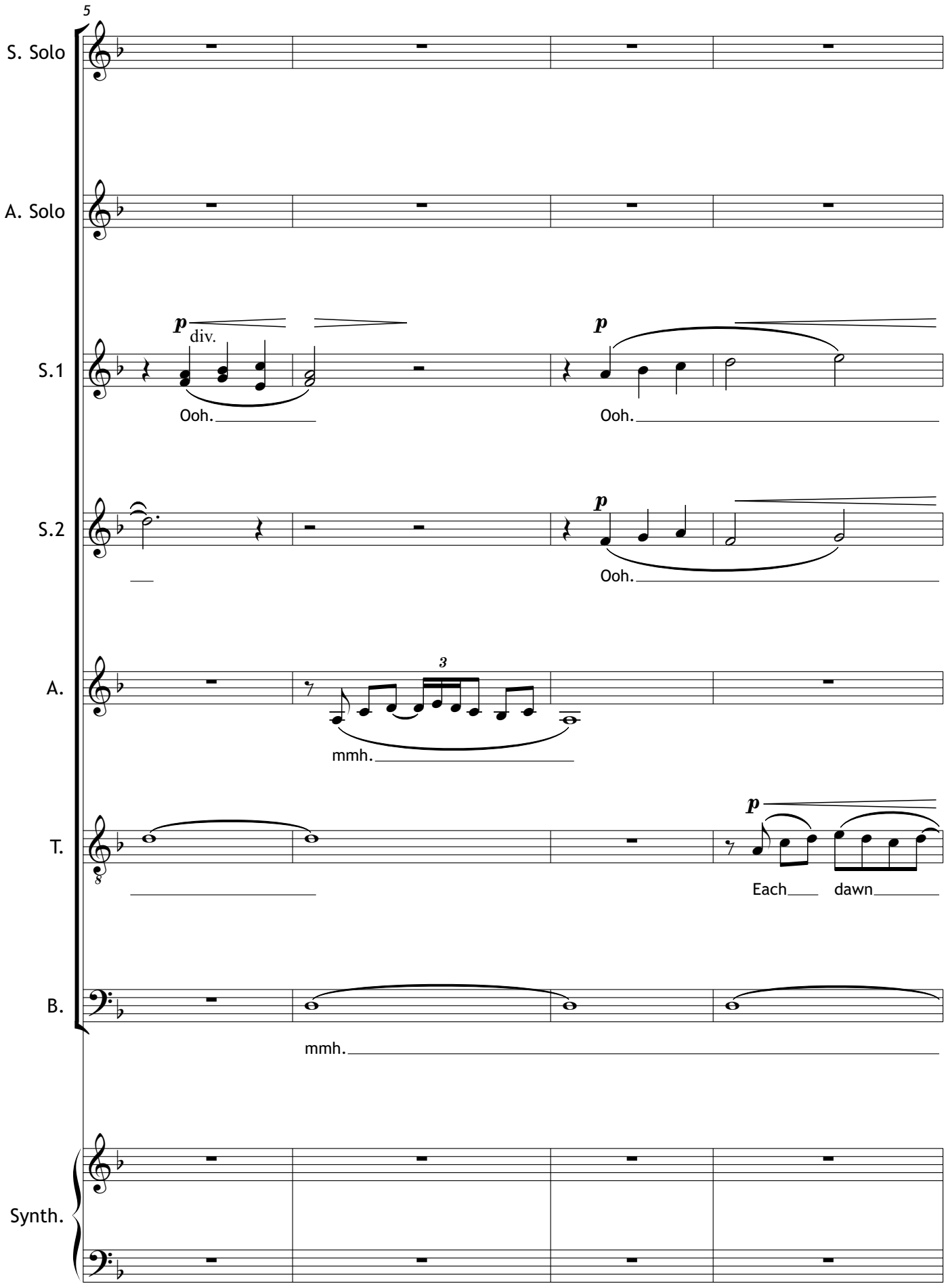

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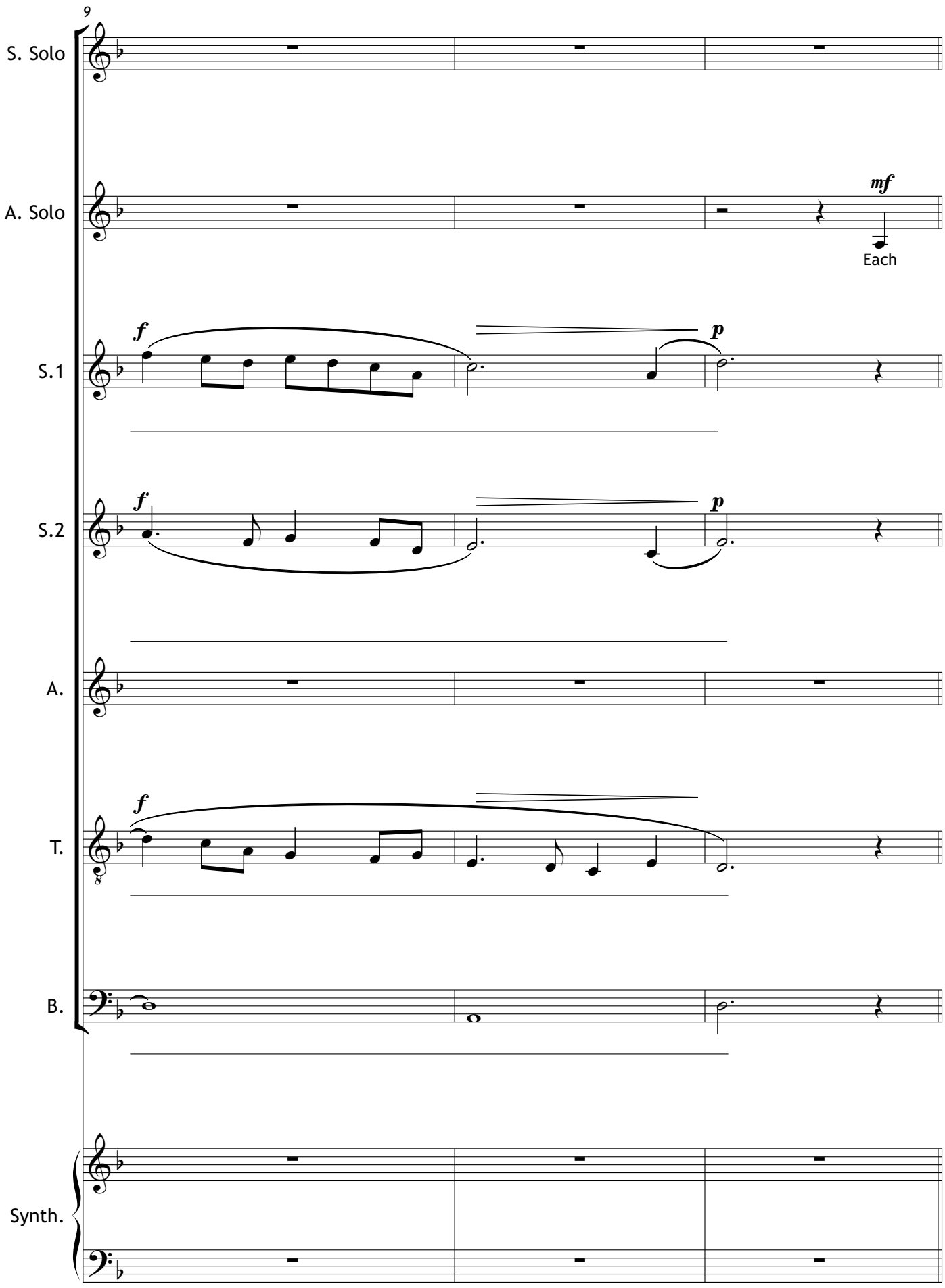

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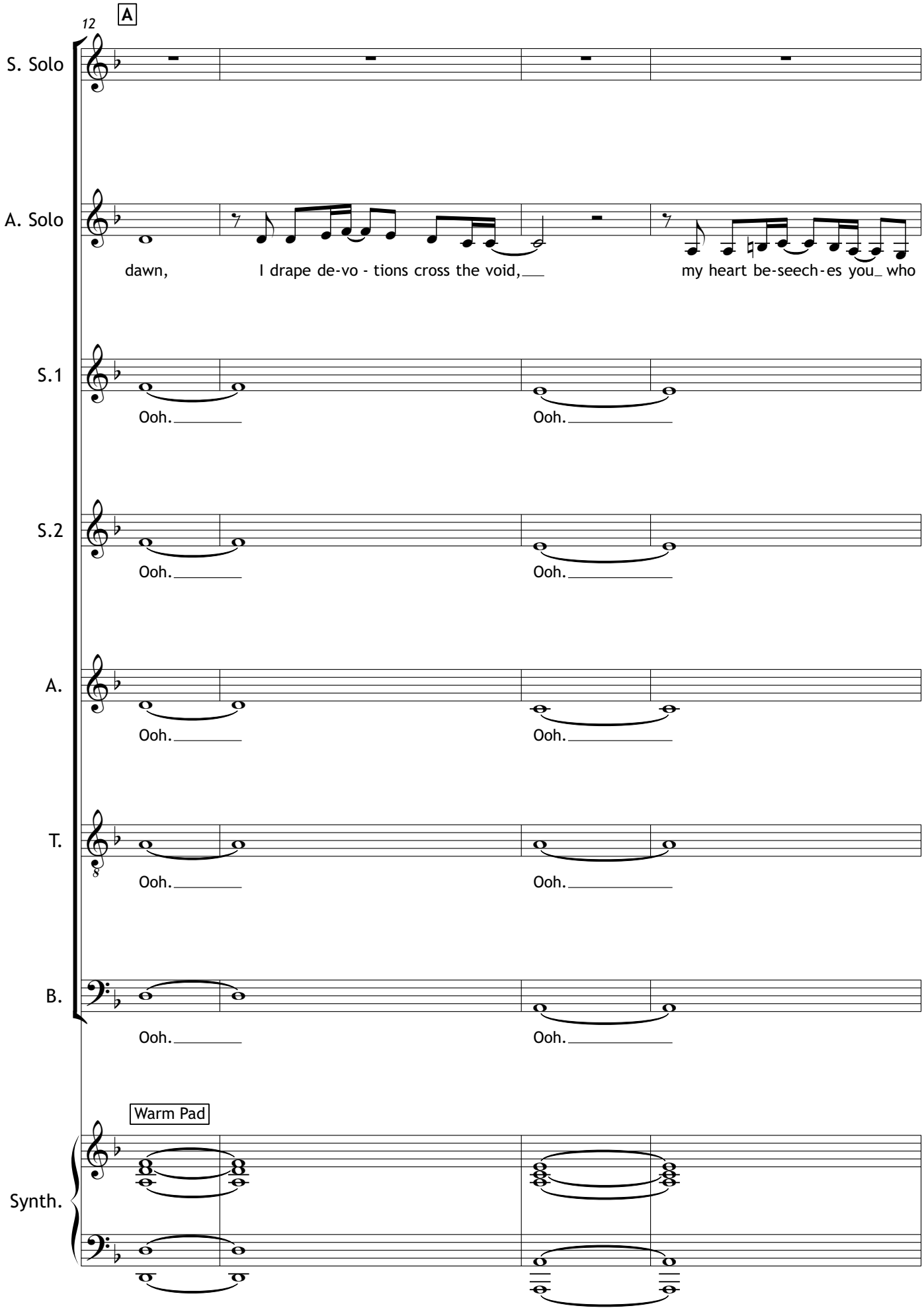

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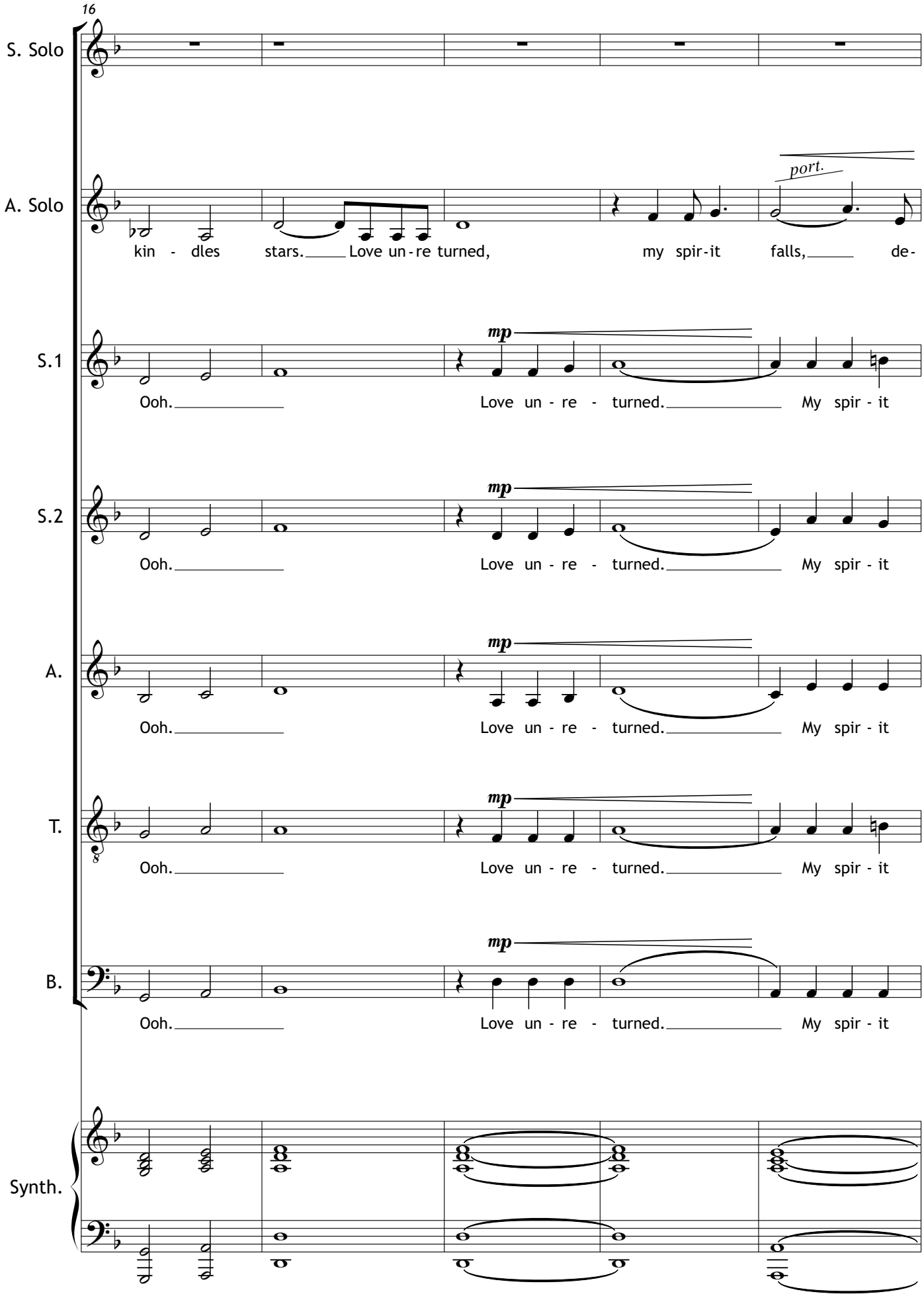

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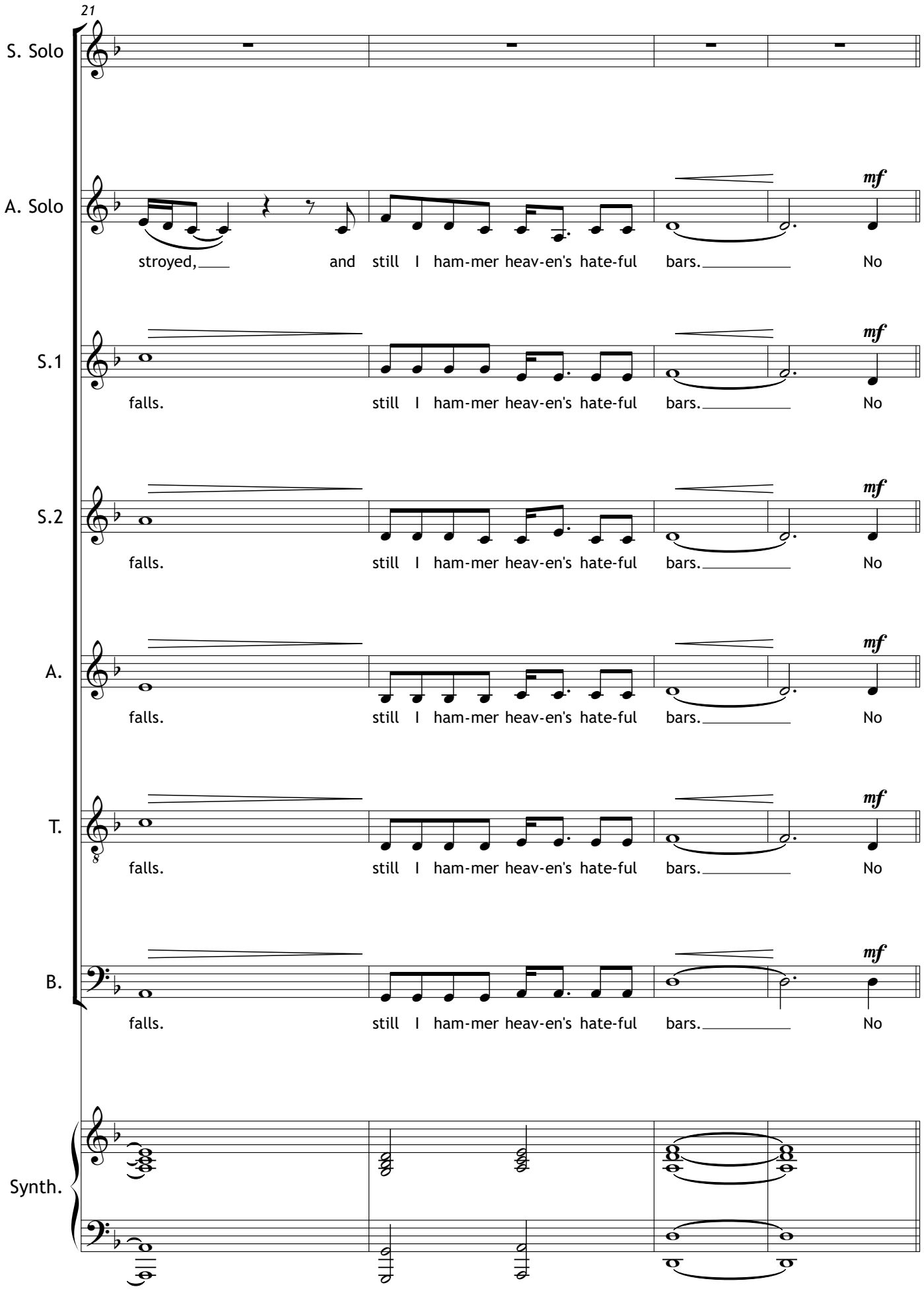

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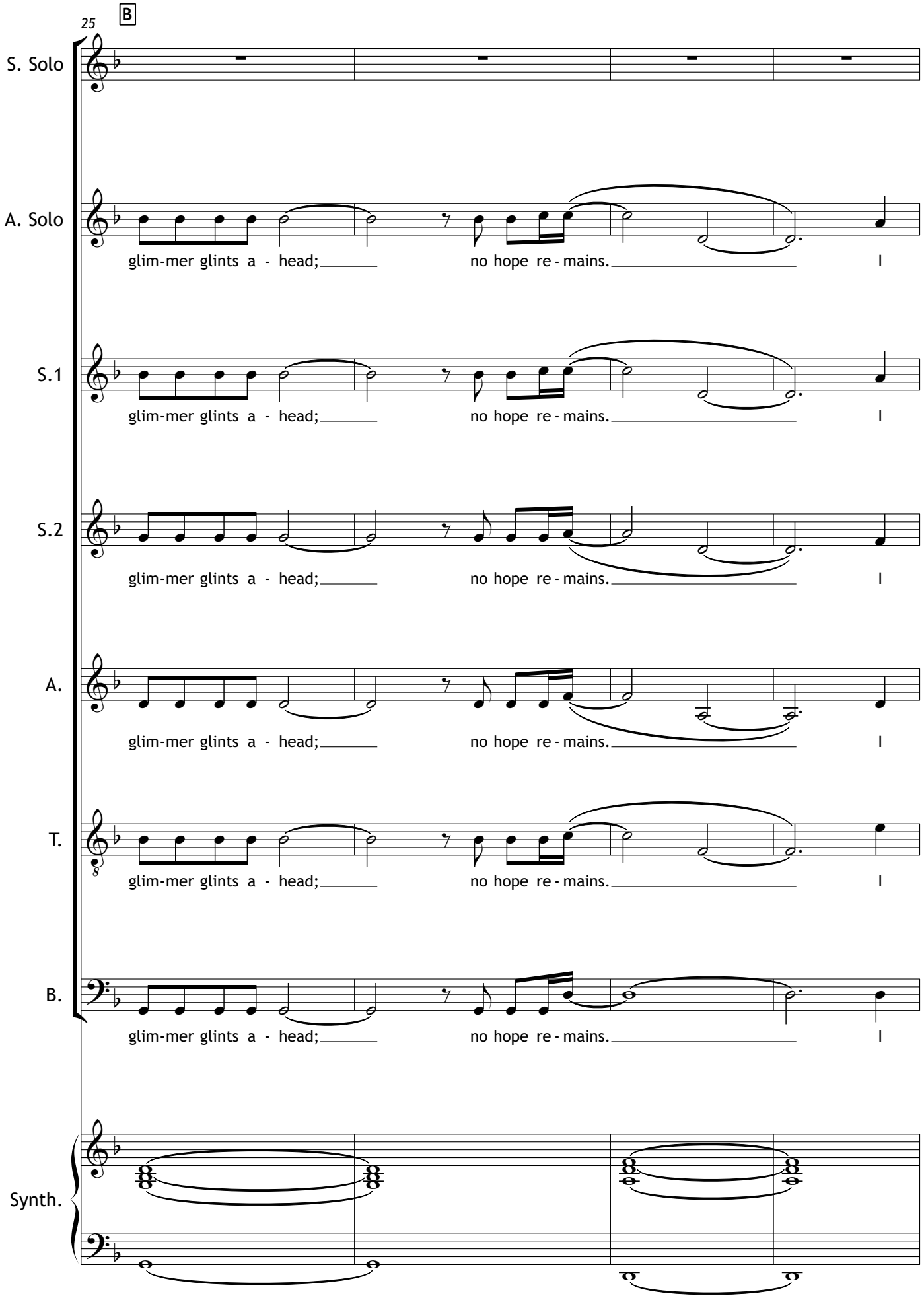

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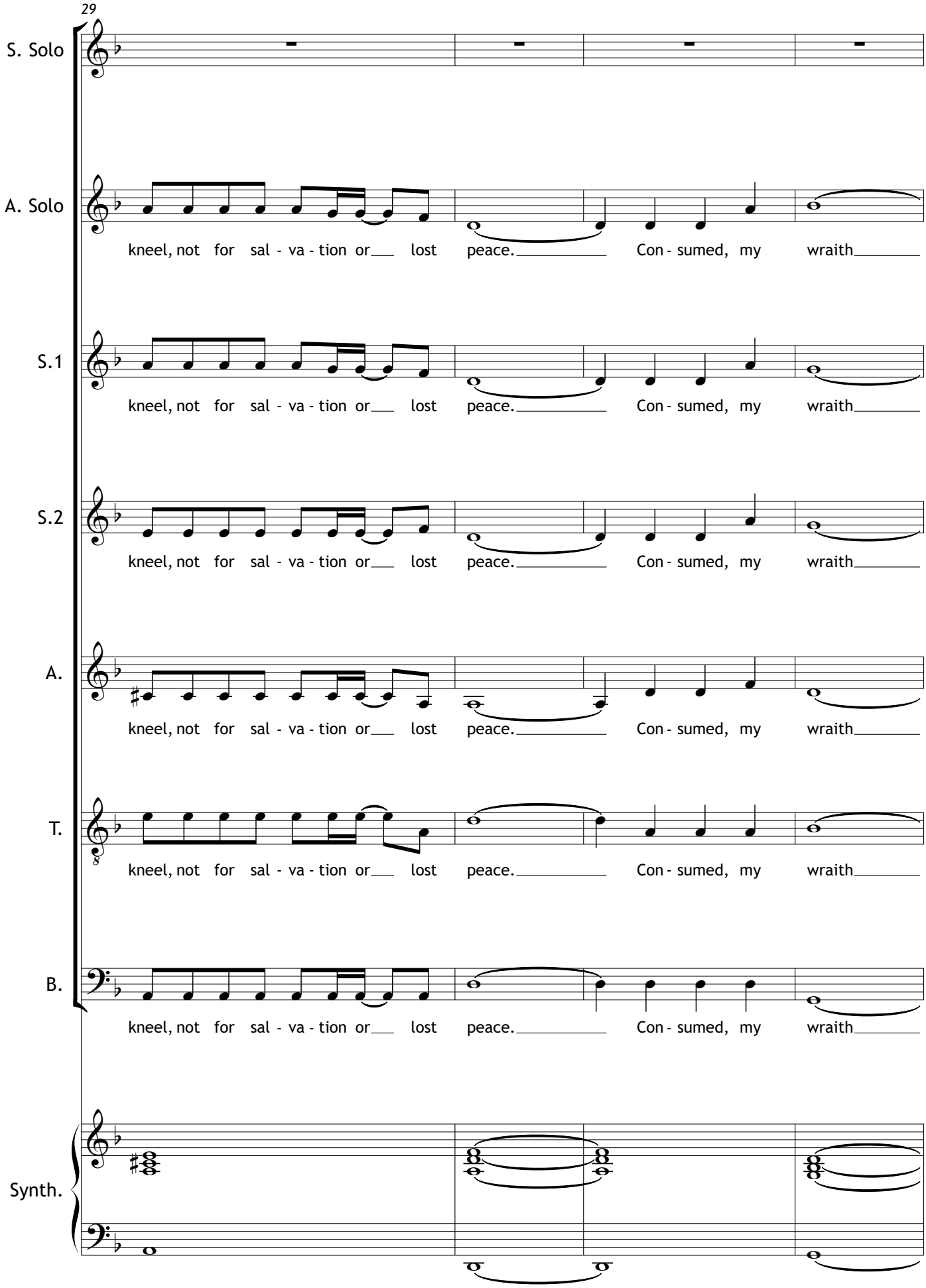

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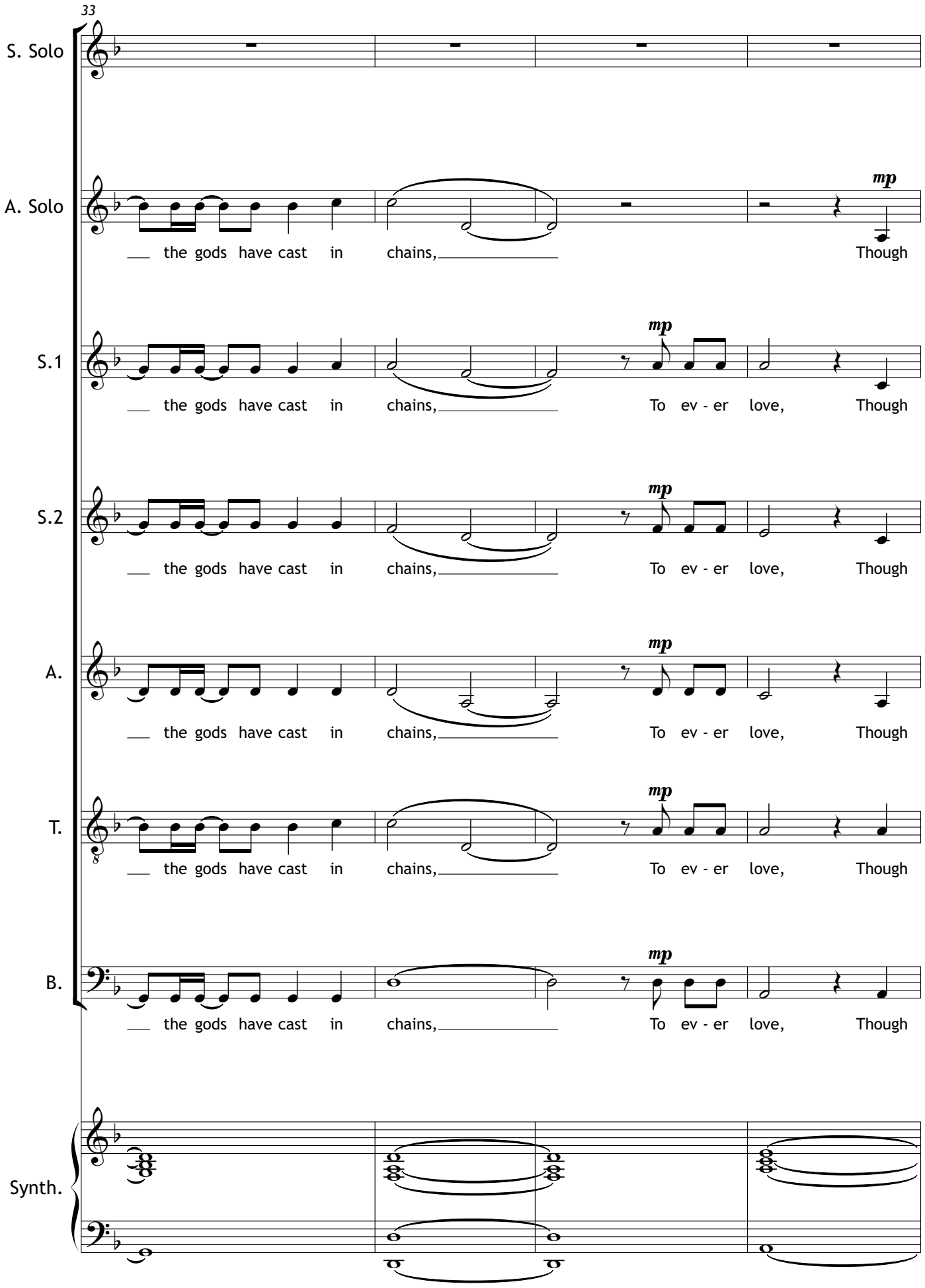

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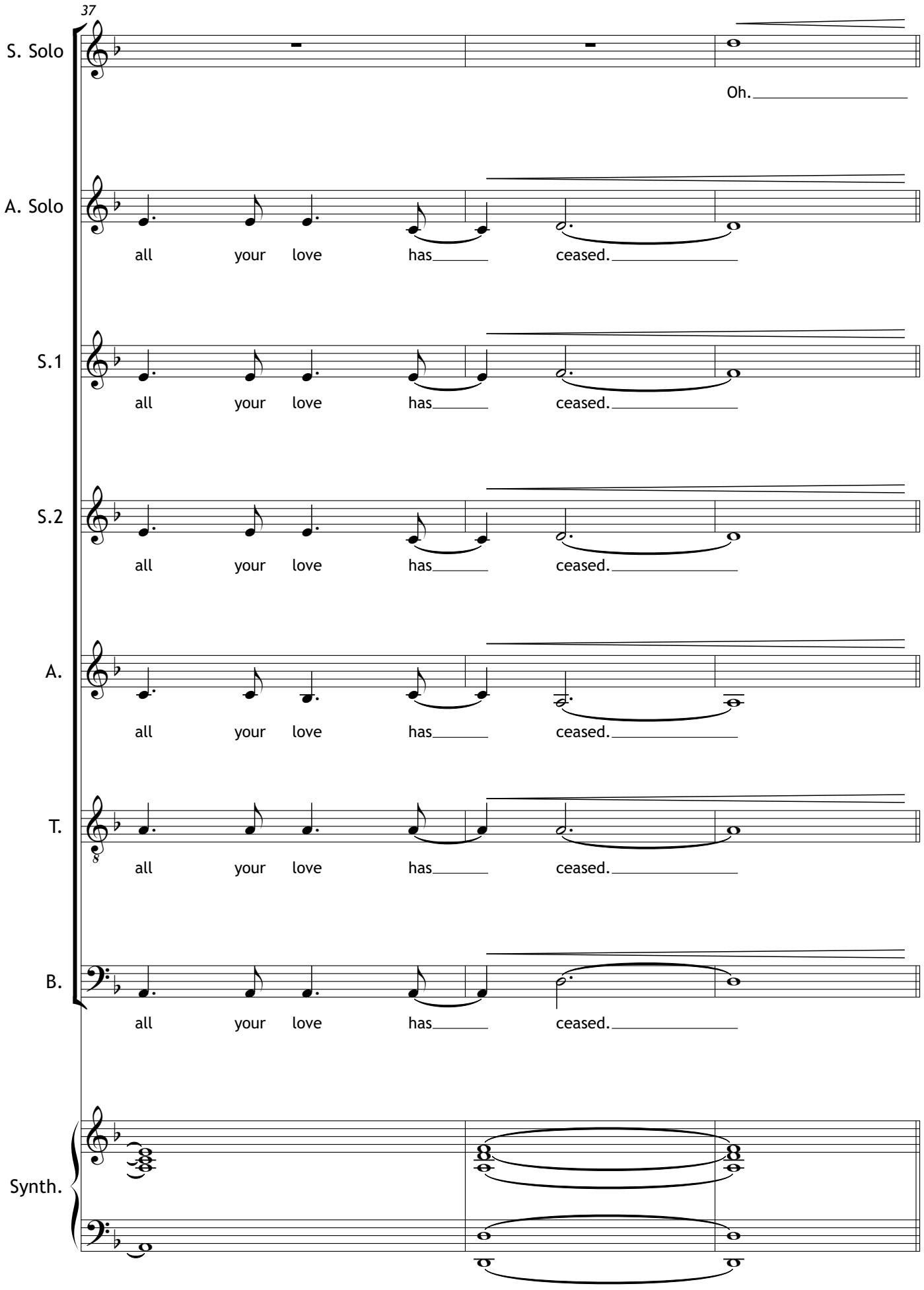

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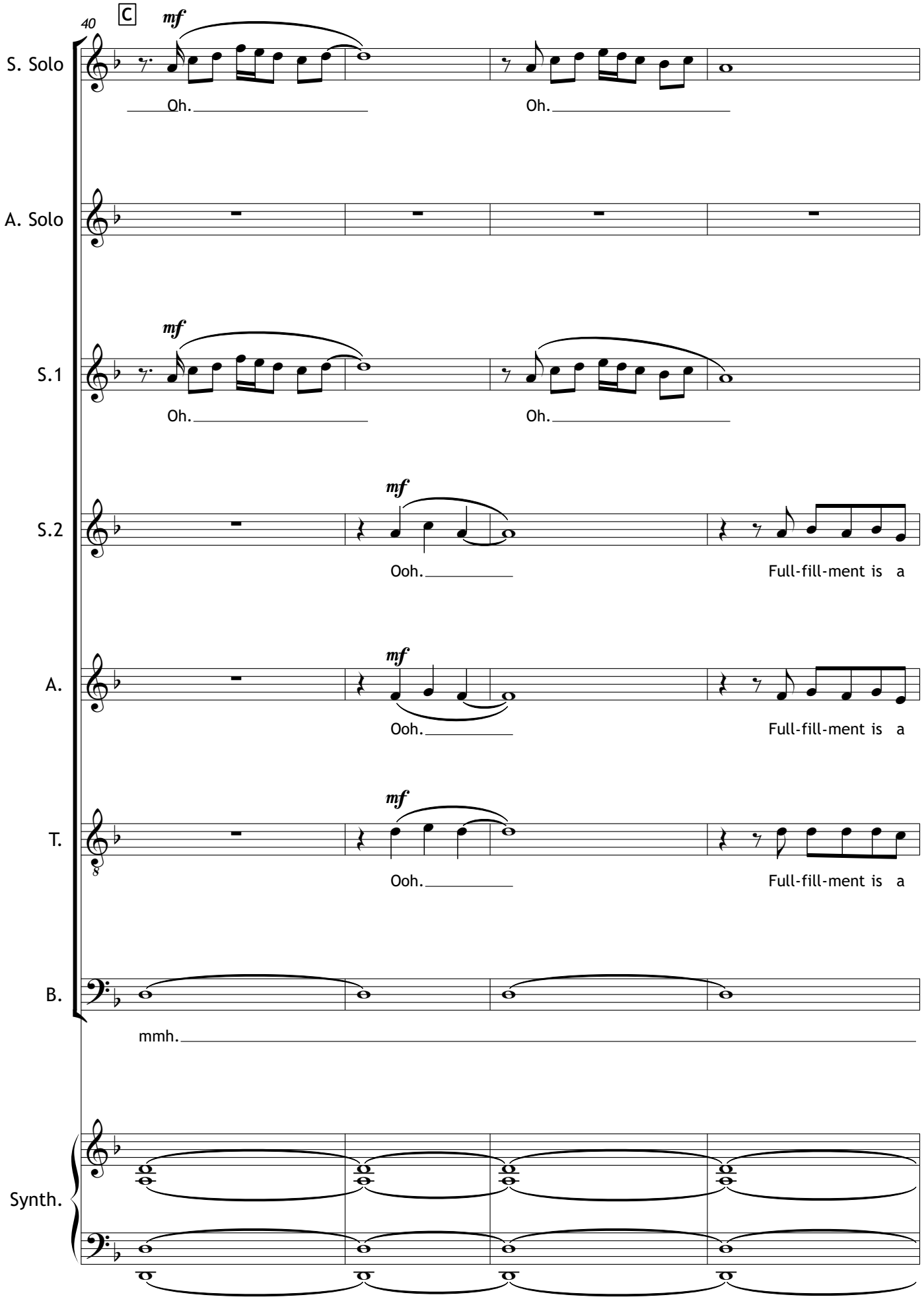

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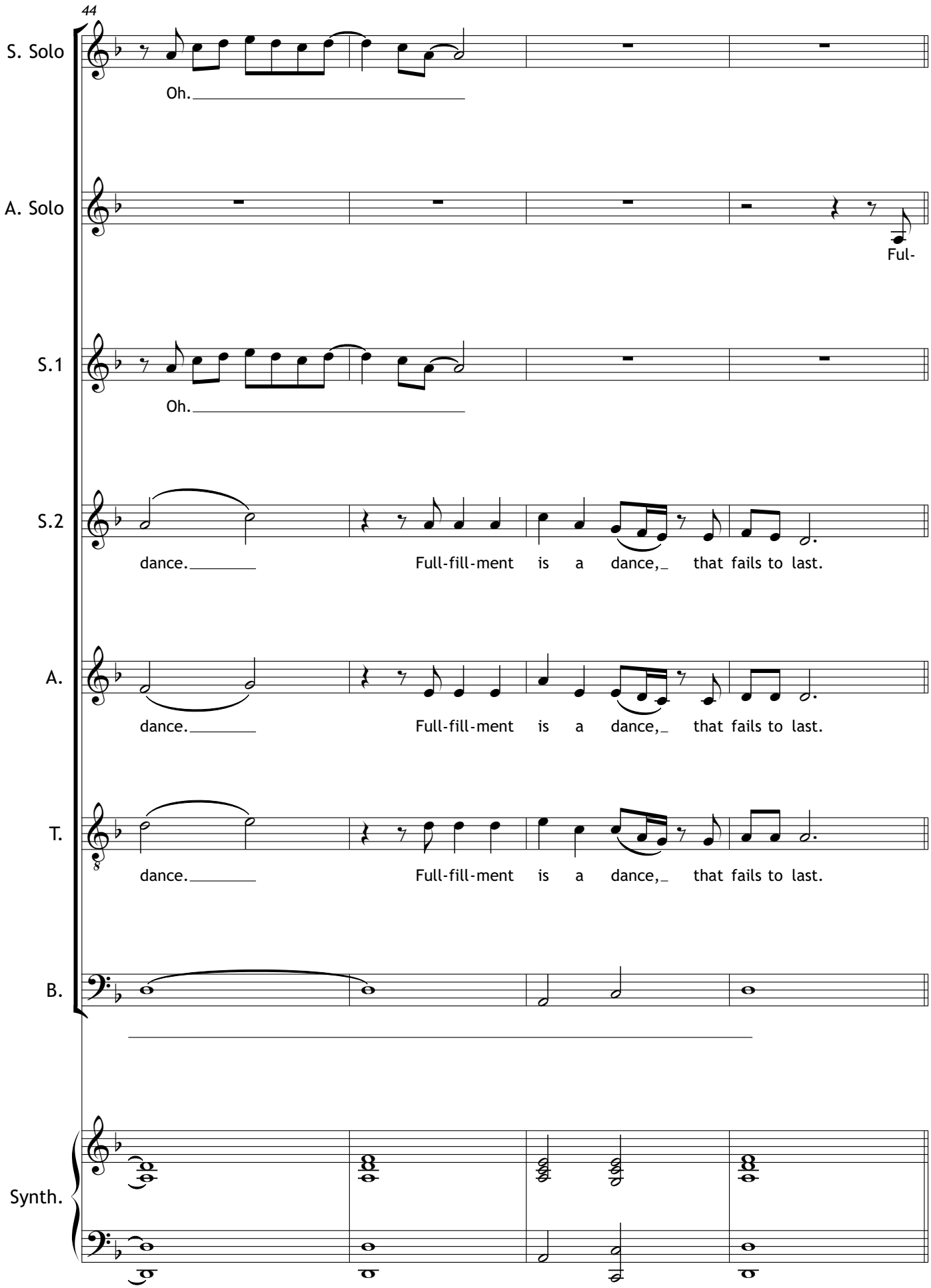

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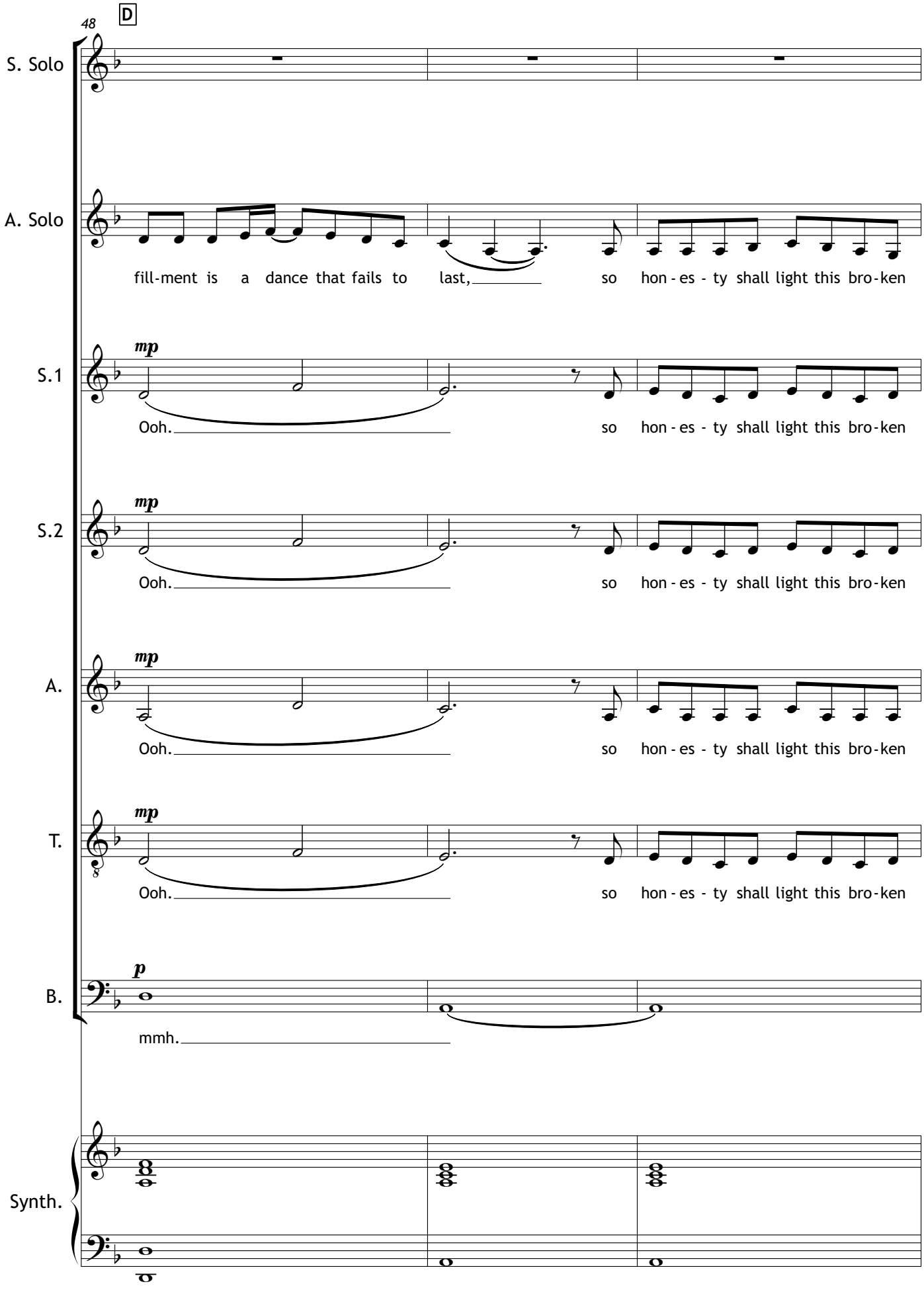

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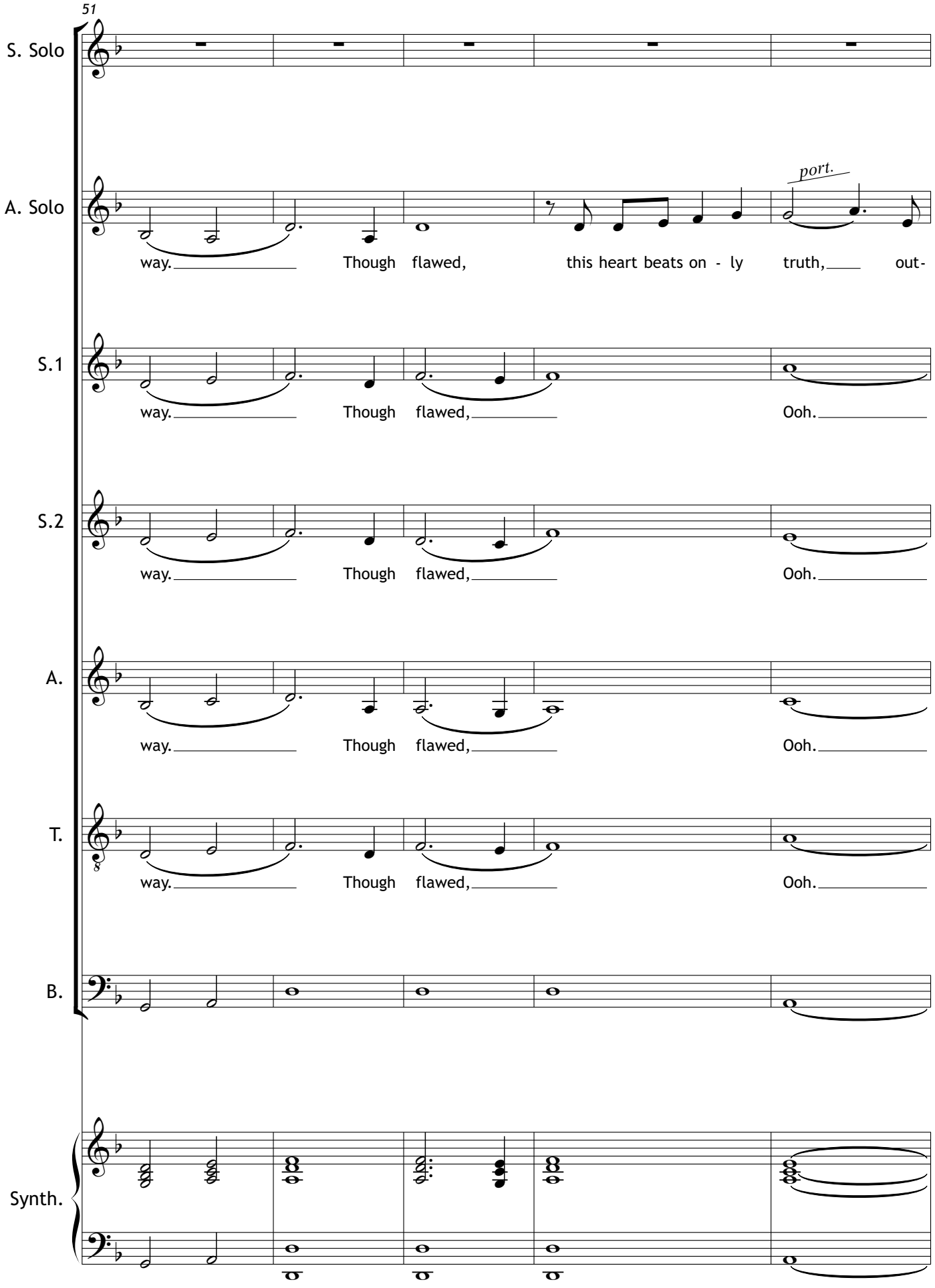

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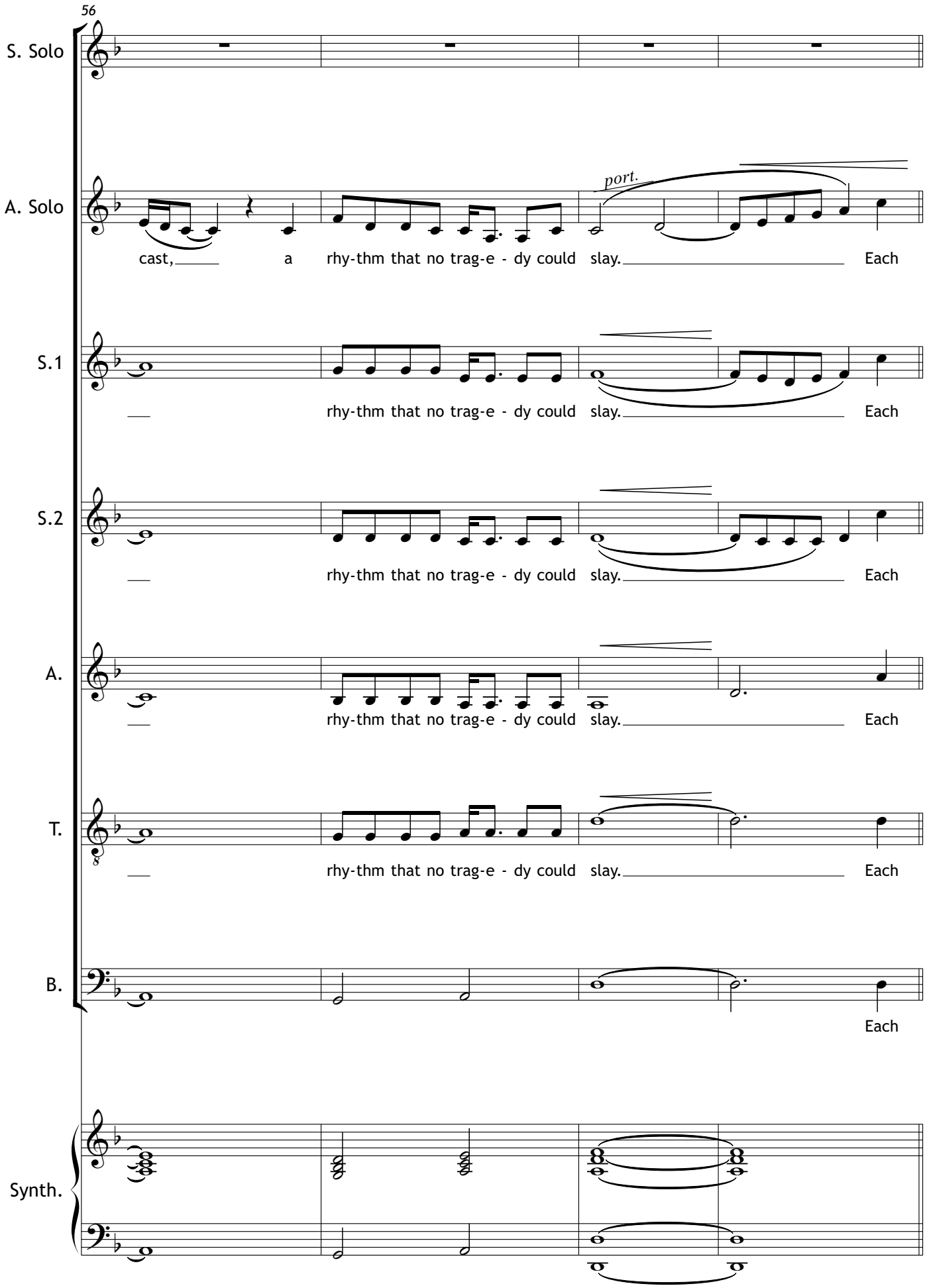

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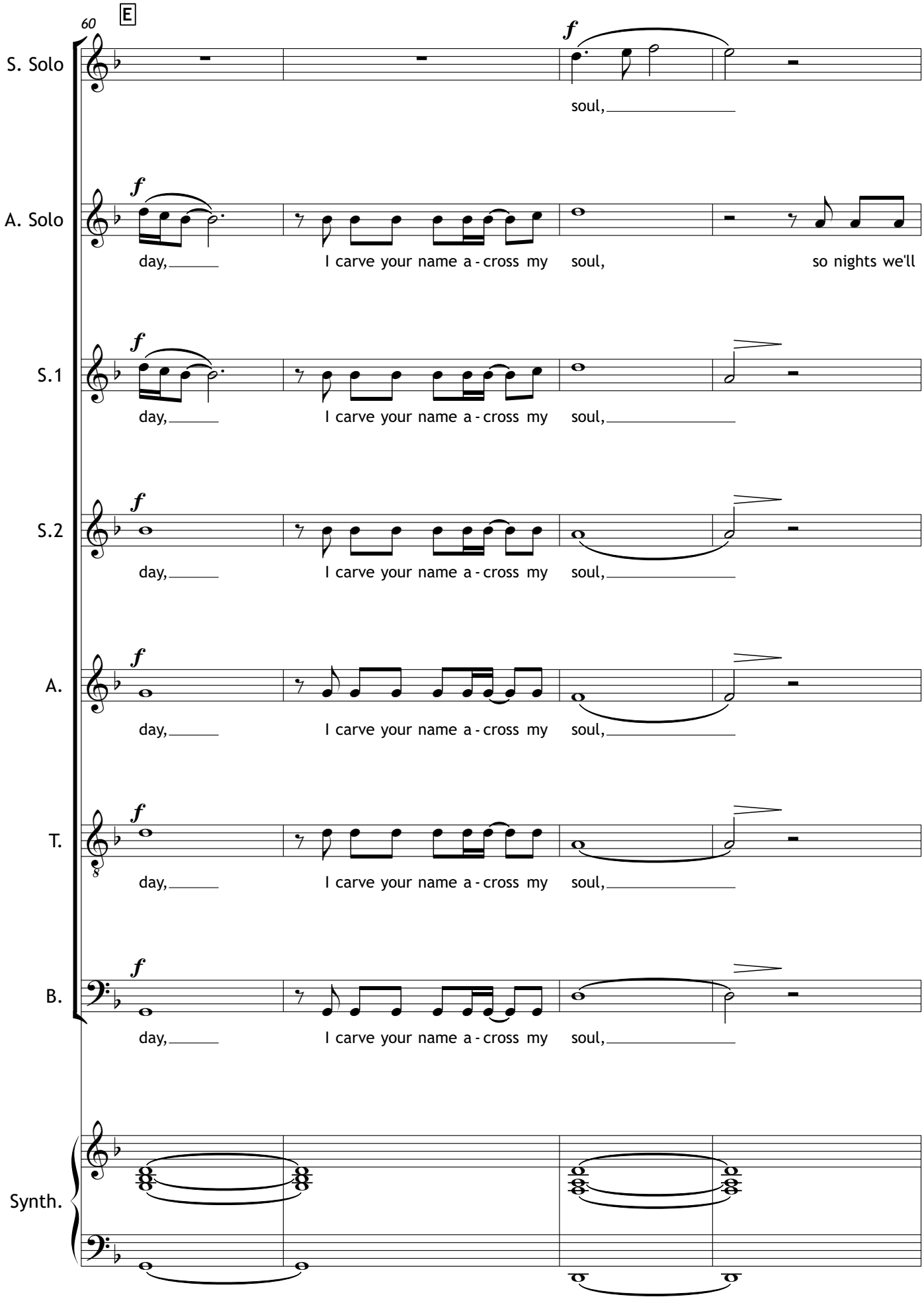

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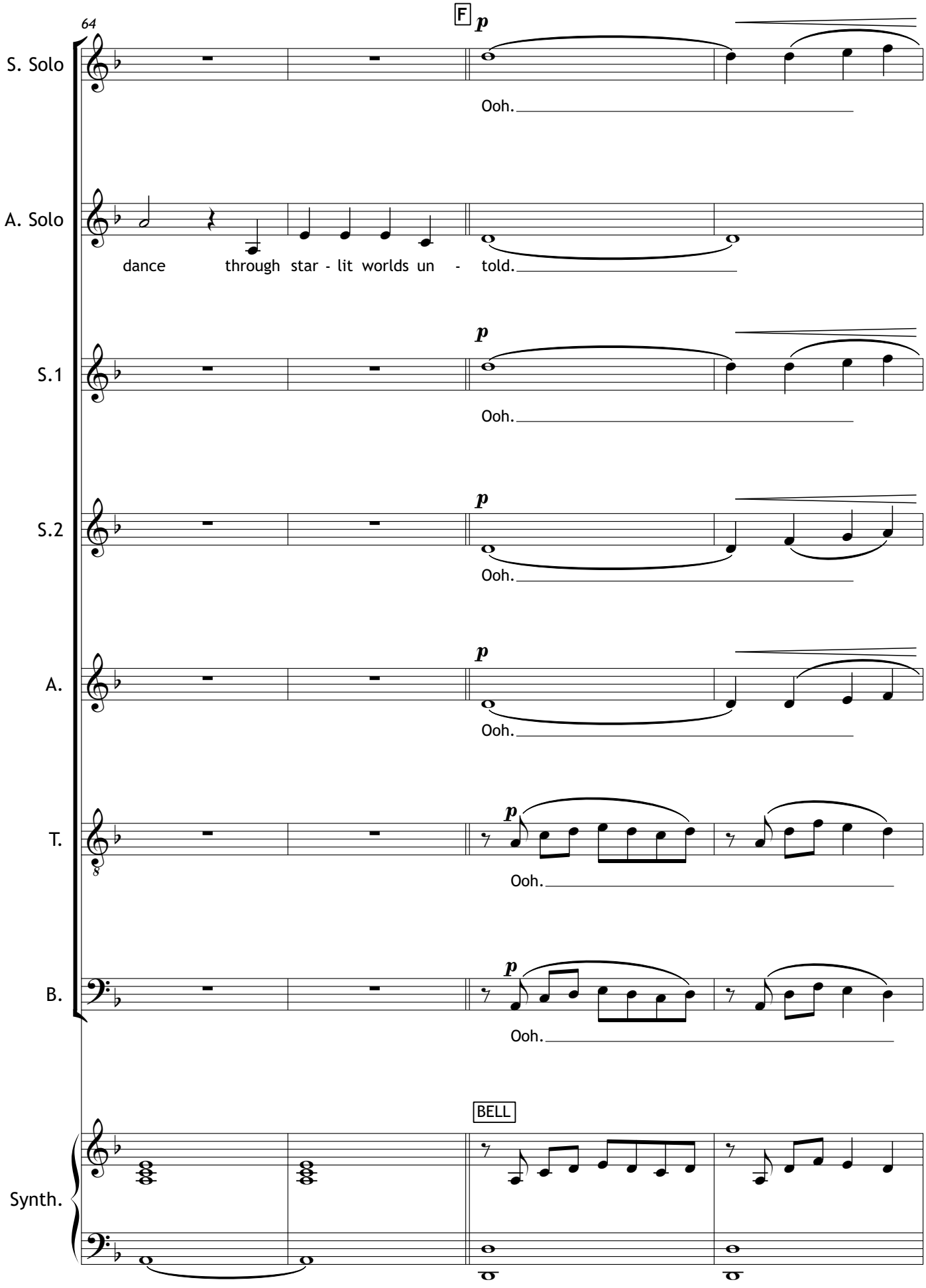

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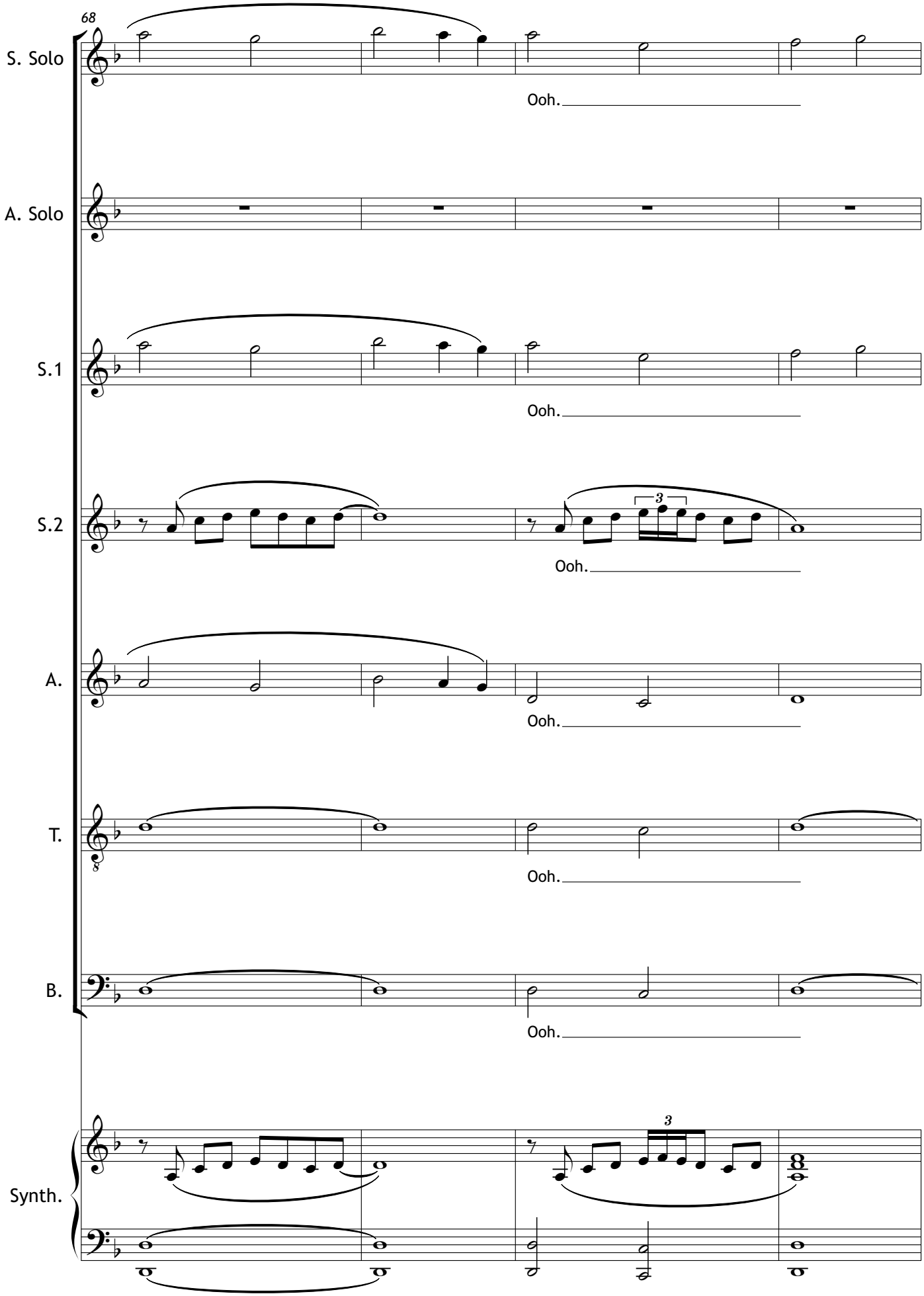

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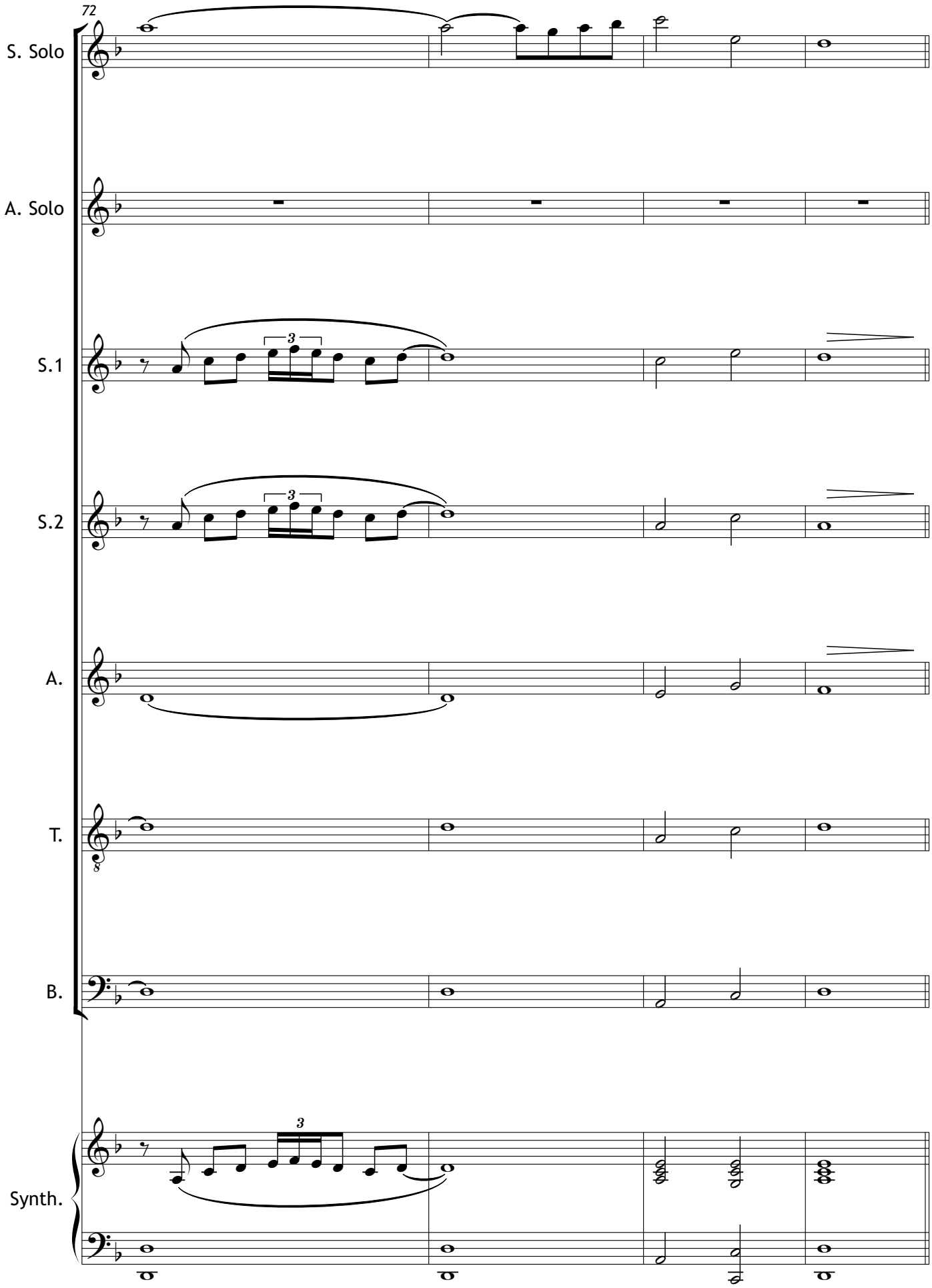

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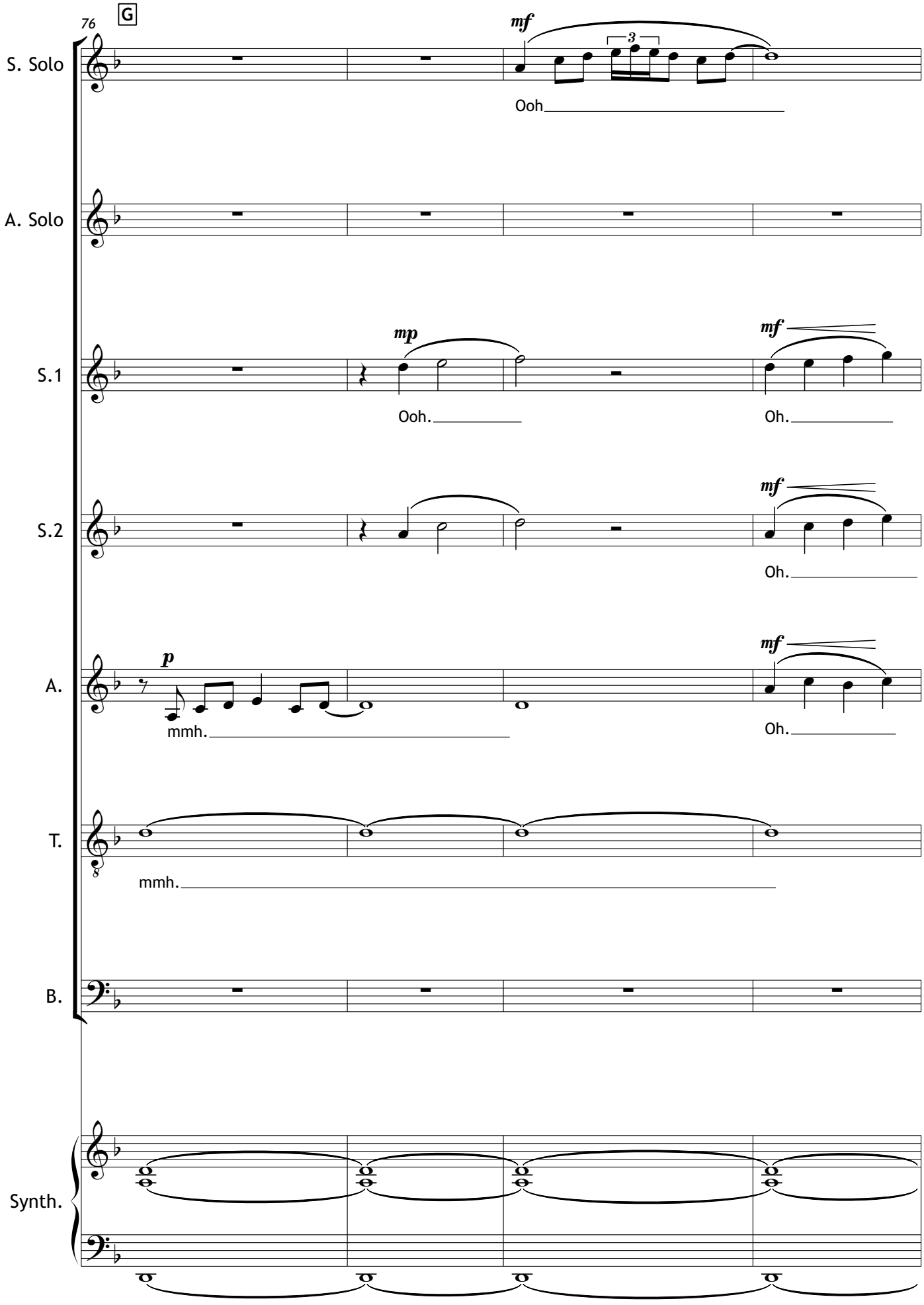

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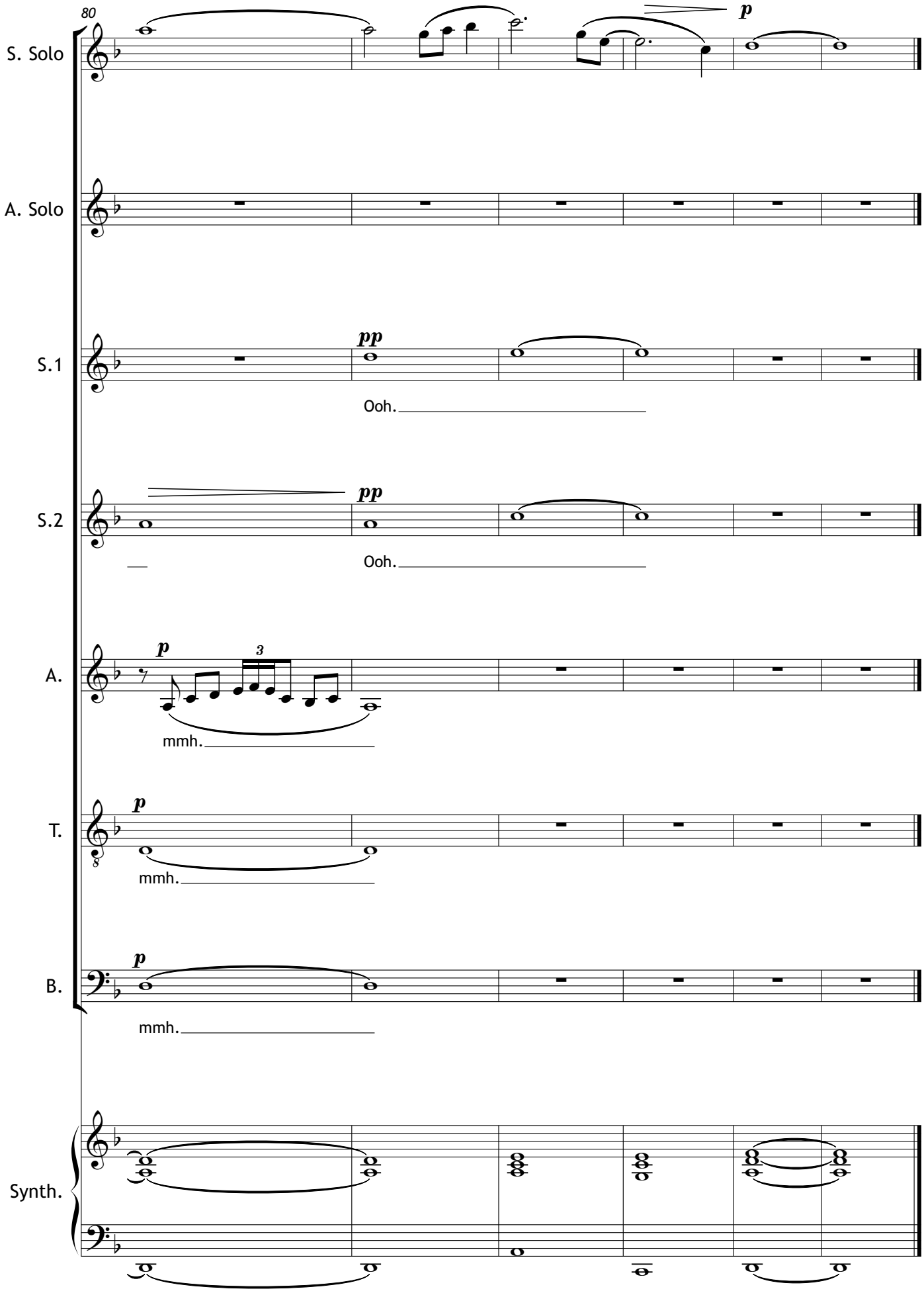

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